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**JOHN O'DONOVAN.**

*(Enlarged from an Ivory Miniature by Bernard Mulrenan, R.H.A.)*

# A Group of Nation-Builders

O'DONOVAN—O'CURRY—PETRIE

BY

REV. PATRICK M. MACSWEENEY

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## FOREWORD

*During the Nineteenth Century Ireland fought along three great lines for the recovery of her freedom as a nation. She fought for free ownership of the land ; she fought for freedom of religion ; and she fought for the freedom of her intellectual life. In doing so she was unerringly laying the foundations of her national well-being. In her battles she has had her heroes : and it is well that their memories should not be allowed to die. In the battle for intellectual freedom it is true to say that O'Donovan, O'Curry, and Petrie are national heroes. They loved Ireland and the Irish people with a lasting love. They cherished the Past of Ireland, they revered it, and they believed in it. They determined that the Ireland of the Future should be bound to the Ireland of the Past by the strong links of knowledge and of love. They forged these links in the white-heat of patriotic research. They were, in every true sense of the word, Nation-builders ; and we, their heirs, must not forget them. To prevent our doing so I have written this little book, and to their memories I dedicate it.*

*P. M. MacS.*

*St. Patrick's College, Maynooth,  
July, 1913.*



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# A Group of Nation-Builders

O'DONOVAN—O'CURRY—PETRIE

## CHAPTER I

### O'DONOVAN'S EARLY YEARS

THE life of a nation is a continuous effort at self-realisation. As the individual strives to give utterance to the rising thoughts within him, so a nation, through the collective mouthpiece of its greatest thinkers, strives to reveal to the world its inner self. Sometimes the attempt is but a partial success appearing in fragmentary scraps of autobiography, or sometimes it seems almost complete in the union in one great man of the representative qualities of his race. The theory of environment as a necessary factor in the appearance from time to time of thoroughly representative types cannot be passed over in the case of John O'Donovan. To understand him, it is necessary to grasp intellectually and imaginatively the past from which he derives.

This strange, idealising, and wandering race of ours has left us sufficient traces of

its past to reconstruct that homeland of thought which was to be the birth-place of O'Donovan. Dwelling in an island ringed round by far-stretching seas whose rock-petals, like a rose, are washed by magic waves, it is no wonder that our people are stamped with something of the mystery that surrounds their island home. Its every feature has been brooded over in imagination by them, and with the loving tenderness of a mother they have called them by sweet-sounding names. The shadow in the glen, the peak piercing the sky, the gap through which the sea-wind blows, the head-land facing the wave, the river fretting the rocky boulders of its mountain bed, the lonely bog where the great elk sleeps his age-long sleep, the sand-dune gleaming white-faced with its necklet of ocean-foam are all reflected in the sensitive, shimmering imagination of the Celt.

Amidst the turmoil of tribal war and the struggles of conflicting races Celtic culture proceeded on its way, gathering up those elements in life which were susceptible of orderly imaginative treatment, whether it be in the growth of Irish art from the simple treatment of the La Tène period, or the growth of Epic Romance from the earliest mythic period through the Táin to its dissolution in the modern "scéal."

This culture has remained remarkably independent of external influences. The one great influence which modified the native culture was that of the Church, and it is a commonplace to say that even the Church, potent as she was in absorbing the interests of the best intellects in Europe in her cause, in Ireland found the stream of secular literature flowing side by side with her own, and, to her credit be it said, in no way impeded it ; but, by pruning it of elements objectionable to her teaching, brought about that commingling of the two currents which has been a stumbling block to some, and a cause of justifiable pride to others.

From the year 450 to the year 900 the early literature of Ireland took shape, and it will be perhaps a surprise to some to hear that its final gleaning commenced when the Danish and Norse influence in Ireland was at its height. As German literature received a new impetus from the threatened domination of France, so it would seem as if Ireland was stimulated into literary activity by the opposition of the Danes ; just as, amidst the excitement of the Jacobite struggle, a new band of poets came to voice her national claims and ambitions.

In the interval between the compilation of such great collections as the *Leabhar*

*na h-Uidhre* and the *Book of Leinster* and the outburst of popular Jacobite poetry, Irish literature suffered, in my opinion, from being too self-contained. The older motifs became played out, and a debased, rhetorical style began to supplant the nervous narrative one of the elder epic. Making all allowance, however, for the natural decay of narrative prose literature, one can safely say that Ireland possesses a body of early epic prose which is without parallel in any early European literature in its romantic and imaginative breadth.

Outside of pure literature the years stretching from the English Invasion to the age of Keating are marked by a rich stock of ecclesiastical, topographical, genealogical and historical literature; and it was this that O'Donovan, whether through the bent of his own mind or the influence of others, set himself to reveal to a public hitherto totally ignorant of it. He and O'Curry had, it is true, all the familiarity of native speakers with the usual traditional versions of the poems of O'Rahilly, Seaghan Claireach, Eoghan Ruadh O'Sullivan, Tadhg Gaodhlach and the rest, which were then current amongst the peasantry of the South of Ireland; but the unknown, as usual, excited their curiosity; it was superfluous to investigate

works that were as household words amongst them. It was left to a later age and movement, when the Famine had rendered indistinct the memory of eighteenth-century lyric, to revive the fame of Eoghan Ruadh and his contemporaries. Four men more particularly have contributed to that revival. O'Daly and Walsh printed a considerable amount of Jacobite poetry, which awakened interest in it in their day. Then came the beautiful verse translations of the learned and esteemed President of the National Literary Society, Dr. Sigerson, and lastly there is the work of Father Dinneen.

John O'Donovan was born at Atateemore, in the County of Kilkenny, in the year 1806, not in 1809 as he himself says. The correct date is proved by the Baptismal register quoted by Father Carrigan in his *History of the Diocese of Ossory*. He grew up therefore at a time when Ireland was awakening to a growing sense of political freedom. The penal days, just passing away, though they had destroyed all political liberty amongst the native Irish, had failed to crush the spirit of domestic joy and of literary effort amongst the peasantry. A first-hand acquaintance with native Irish literature of the eighteenth century and earlier nineteenth will show how much of real intellectual life, of literary aspiration, and of

strong religious emotion was to be found amongst a people who up to this had been commonly reputed as naught but hewers of wood and drawers of water.

In the sanded kitchen of the local inn or in the wide ingle-nook of a farmer's house, where the fire threw weird dancing figures on the smoked rafters, would be heard tales of other days recalling epic figures of an heroic past, or the legends of the patron saint whose well stood near, or the impromptu repartees in verse bandied between two famous local "filés." Nor was the travelling schoolmaster without his part in the life of the time. In many instances he was both poet and schoolmaster, the latter by necessity, the former by choice.

With the growth of political freedom and the establishment of Maynooth (1795), Latin Schools, as they were called, became more numerous, and helped to prepare the way for the collegiate system of to-day. The great mass of the Irish Catholic Clergy found opportunities at home for education, and the old French type became less and less prominent. Coming to Dublin in 1823, young O'Donovan was sent to one of these Latin schools. His first intention was to enter Maynooth but, finding he had no vocation for the priesthood, he turned his attention to the study of Irish. A fondness



for quoting Latin phrases or rendering Irish place-names by their Latin equivalents revealed in his after-life the influence of his early training. His knowledge of Latin also bore fruit, as we shall see, in the production of his Irish Grammar, and in the growth of that feeling for textual accuracy which a study of the classics is sure to awaken.

At the early age of nine years we find O'Donovan commencing the study of Irish and of Latin, and he is able to say that in two years' time he could transcribe "Irish pretty well." He was, therefore, in a position to benefit to the full by that Celtic culture whose twilight gleam filled the life of our people in the pre-famine years with a suffused poetic glow. He was the inheritor and child of a glorious past, of that traditional culture which has withdrawn itself to its solitude on the borders of the Western Sea.

Up to this time the two races in Ireland had taken but little interest in their respective literatures. The old Georgian city of Dublin, redolent of the memories of its Anglo-Irish corporation, of its idolatry of King Billy and of its hatred of King James, of its harbouring of that literary rebel Swift, and of that vagrant sojourner in many places, Goldsmith, led a life apart. Its printing presses—and their fame is once

again being resuscitated—turned out excellent reprints of Addison, Defoe, Swift, Steele, Johnson, Parnell, and Goldsmith, whilst the resident Anglo-Irish nobility, by their patronage of the Arts, laid the foundation of that musical tradition which it is to be hoped our city will maintain; but it was uninfluenced by the Celtic culture of the West. It looked askance at it, as at something barbarous, and it has taken a century of propaganda to break down, even in part, the prejudices which, emanating from the metropolis, infected a naturally imitative people. Nor did the rebellion of '98, a rebellion arising amongst palesmen and amongst Northern Presbyterians, do much to stir up an interest in the Celtic land beyond. It developed its own cycle of literary legend, a cycle which can be connected with the native Celtic one by a synthesis which is not literary but national. The movement for Catholic emancipation and the repeal of the Union stirred the masses of the Irish people and laid the foundation of that long series of political agitations which mark the years of the last century, but which, with the exception of the Young Ireland movement, were mainly political; if anything, they centred the interests of our people on material and industrial, rather than on purely intellectual progress; whilst

the introduction of a system of education which eliminated all virile reference to the past history, literature, and language of the country seemed to ring the death-knell of all possibility of resuscitating Irish studies, and of thus winning for native Irish culture its fitting place in the history of European civilisation.

## CHAPTER II

### HIS WORK ON THE SURVEY

FORTUNATELY, however, apart from the tenacity of native tradition, two forces were at play which helped to awaken the self-consciousness of our race. The Romantic movement in English literature, represented on its antiquarian side by Scott, kindled a reverent feeling for the past in the minds of the men of the early Victorian era. In poetry this tendency was represented in Ireland by Thomas Moore, and however little his *Tara's Hall* or his *Red Branch Knights* would answer to the reality, we must at least admit that Moore melodiously invited us to remember the days of old, and made it rather fashionable to do so. He is responsible for propagating a legend, but a legend is often an alluring bait to a

deeper study of the reality underlying it. As a collateral result of the Romantic movement, the apparently more prosaic study of antiquities began to flourish. The Royal Irish Academy, founded in 1795 for the study of Science, Polite Literature and Antiquities, opened the breach in the walls of Anglo-Irish Dublin through which the first scientific knowledge of the history of the Gael was to enter. Unfortunately its exposition was undertaken in the early years of the last century by men who, foreigners by birth and faddists by nature, were but little competent to understand it. The school of Vallancey and of Betham produced one useful result—it awakened the undying opposition of Petrie, O'Donovan, and O'Curry, and thus gave birth to their immortal work.

O'Donovan's introduction to the Academy circle was through James Hardiman, Commissioner of Public Records and author of *Irish Minstrelsy* and of a *History of Galway*, a man of scholarly instincts, and one for whom O'Donovan entertained the liveliest and sincerest feelings of friendship. In the letters which he wrote to Hardiman, and which are preserved in the Royal Irish Academy, he unburdens himself with a freedom which makes them a priceless record of his real opinions on the various

subjects which agitated him throughout his life. Previous to his employment on the Survey, Hardiman engaged him, at a ridiculously low wage it is true, to do miscellaneous work, and during this time he made the transcript of Peter Connell's *Irish Dictionary* which is now deposited in Trinity College Library. O'Donovan was then but twenty-four years of age, and a few years later we find him denouncing, with characteristic energy, a certain Mr. Otway, who had ventured to attack Hardiman's *Irish Minstrelsy* in a paper called the *Examiner*: "Mr. Otway," he says, "(Out-way, i.e.,  $\Delta\tau\ \Delta\eta\ \tau\text{-}\rho\lambda\iota\gamma\epsilon\iota\text{-}\Delta\eta\mu\ \rho\epsilon\alpha\delta\acute{\epsilon}\rho\alpha\eta$ ) is a very bad judge of the merit of your publication, and I tell him emphatically that until he is master of the subject and of the original language of the poems, he is not entitled to a hearing at the bar of true criticism." O'Donovan was not long in establishing his own claim to a hearing at the bar of true criticism.

Having read a notice in the *Dublin Penny Journal* to the effect that the Editor was prepared to publish articles on Irish History and Literature, he seized the opportunity for publishing his first essay in the translation of Irish texts, namely—the translation of King Aldfred's Poem which appeared in the number for September 15th, 1832.

This was followed in the following week by his translation of the Charter of Newry in which is seen that wide knowledge of sources and that scholarly exactitude which mark an epoch in the department of Irish Historical Research. A full list of his papers in this *Journal*, as well as of his papers in the *Journal* of the Kilkenny Archæological Society and the *Ulster Journal of Archæology*, will be found in the excellent Bibliography of his works compiled by Mr. Henry Dixon for “*An Leabharlann*.” His papers in the *Dublin Penny Journal* were continued up to August, 1833, when his work on the Ordnance Survey commenced to absorb all his attention and left him little time for editorial work.

The foundation of the Historical Department of the Ordnance Survey gave O'Donovan his real chance. The desirability of mapping the abundant antiquarian remains for which Ireland is famous and of registering the expressive names of places had been felt since Petty's time. An accurate ear, a knowledge of Middle and Modern Irish, and above all a love of investigation were necessary for success in the work, and all three were found combined in a unique degree in O'Donovan; it might also be added, considering the conditions under which he worked, a constitution inured to

hardship and privation. Only a man of iron constitution and of indomitable will would have gone through with this work for which a beggarly remuneration was given, and which entailed exposure to damp and chill and discomfort of every kind. The outdoor work of the Survey was done by O'Donovan practically single-handed. Petrie, the head of the Department, with his little band of fellow-workers had their offices in 21 Great Charles Street, Dublin. Of the personnel of the staff, Wakeman, a member of it, has left us the following account, from which I make this extract : " I should like to dwell," he says, " a moment on the scene of that very happy time, when we used to meet in Dr. Petrie's back-parlour. There was our venerable chief with his ever ready smile and gracious word ; there poor Charles Mangan with his queer puns and jokes, and odd little cloak, and wonderful hat. It was in that office Mangan penned his since famous ballad, *The Woman of Three Cows*, and I verily believe the composition did not occupy him half an hour. . . .

" At this time O'Donovan was about thirty years of age. As in the case of almost every man who has risen to distinction he was an unwearied worker, never sparing himself and evidently holding his occupation a labour of love. With all employed in the

office he was a general favourite, and in the intervals between his most serious business would often give us some of his experiences as a traveller, telling his tale in a rich emphatic manner peculiarly his own."

From 1832, when he succeeded O'Reilly, the compiler of the *Irish Dictionary*, O'Donovan was continuously engaged on the Survey till its suppression by Government in 1842. At first lists of names of places were drawn up, and for this purpose he consulted printed and manuscript sources. His knowledge of the Irish language stood him here in good stead, and his information with time became encyclopædic. But this work was only preparatory to his work, as we might term it, in the field. With a mind replete with historical, antiquarian, and literary lore, and with an imagination quick to recreate scenes of a distant past, he started on his tour of investigation and verification in the various counties of Ireland. Like O'Dubhagain, that ancient topographer in verse, whose work he was afterwards to edit with loving care, he could preface the account of his epic journeying with the legend :

Ṭriallam timcheall na fórla—

"Let us journey round Ireland";

and journey he did with the zest of a man to whom every inch of Irish ground was



pregnant with suggestion, and to whom the manners and customs of his countrymen were a perennial source of interest.

The Survey letters, 103 volumes of which are deposited in the Royal Irish Academy, are the greatest single monument of his labour. They are probably the most remarkable and largest series of official letters in the world. A hundred books could be written from the material they afford; for in them we find history, antiquities, genealogies, legends, and that which now deserves special mention—observations on contemporary types and customs. O'Donovan is famous for his learning,—but in these letters we see how little of the pedant he was. They are the least official letters ever penned. O'Donovan possessed that naïveté of expression, that child-like zest in the study of human nature, and that opened-eyed readiness to receive impressions which would have made of him a first-rate delineator of social types and customs. As it is, forgetting for a moment the official and learned side of his work, it is, I think, safe to say that the most intimate picture of Ireland immediately before the Famine is to be got from his letters.

This quickness of observation for present things was united to an imaginative sympathy with the past. Standing in the

graveyard of Uisge-chaoín in the County of Donegal, in which the grave-stones exhibit the names of the principal septs of Inishowen, "I was moved," he says, "by various emotions upon viewing the graveyard which encloses the ashes of Prince Eoghan, the first Christian convert in Inishowen, and of fifty generations of his descendants, and these emotions were heightened by viewing the princely figure of MacLoughlin, the eldest branch of his descendants, who is now the actual possessor of the old graveyard and of the field in which the celebrated Uisge-chaoín or Clarifont springs."

Nothing but the power of thus emotionalising his work would have enabled him to go through with the investigation of the spelling of 62,000 townlands and of 144,000 names on maps. It gives us the key to the zest with which he confronted difficulties that would have been insurmountable to most men. Quite frequently we find references such as the following, in a letter dated September 3rd, 1835, from Rosnakill: "We finished the Index to the Barony of Kilmacrenan at 2 o'clock last night after having worked sixteen hours on it without intermission." It was no wonder, therefore, that O'Donovan, who had, before going on the Survey, recruited his health at the house of his friend Myles John O'Reilly, should

again feel the effects of overwork and hardship. In the letter quoted above we find him stating: "I am feverish to-day from the effect of damp beds, the absorption of water always creates pains in my bones"; and in a letter dated September 11th, 1835, from Ballyconnell, in which we see his kind-hearted consideration for others, he says: "I am glad that O'Keeffe has not ventured to come here in this stormy season, for the irregularity of the diet, the damp of the beds, and the annoyance to be met with in country public-houses would kill him in one month."

Of the niggardly treatment of O'Donovan in the matter of remuneration, the following remark from one of the Down Letters is, I think, sufficient: "By going so often to Hillsborough I lost *three days* and incurred an expense of *nine* shillings, which caused me great anxiety of mind." To comment on that would be an impertinence. Such was the treatment meted out to one of the greatest Irish scholars of the century, a man on whose titanic work a whole host of parasitic scholars have battered without in the least exhausting the noble vein of golden information of which he was the creator.

## CHAPTER III

### INFLUENCE OF PETRIE ON O'DONOVAN AND O'CURRY

THOUGH it would rather surprise some of their contemporaries were I to put it in this way, I have no hesitation in saying that O'Donovan and O'Curry gathered round them that small band of earnest workers who were to lay the foundations of Irish scholarship in the coming years. It is true O'Donovan looked on Hardiman as his sponsor in Irish studies, but it was to O'Donovan and O'Curry that Todd and Petrie came for the solution of all their linguistic difficulties, and it was O'Curry, Hardiman, Petrie, and O'Donovan who established the Republic of Irish Letters.

Up to this time the department of Antiquities in the Royal Irish Academy had been dominated by Betham, the Ulster King-at-Arms, but Petrie and Todd soon set to work to oust him from the position he held and to lay the foundation of an accurate and scholarly school in that institution. The *coup de-grâce* was given to Betham in the battle royal fought in the Academy on the evening of June 24th, 1844; to this famous bout O'Donovan thus graphic-

ally refers in a letter written to Hardiman from 49 Bayview Avenue, North Strand, Dublin, and dated June 25th, 1844: "I hear no news here worth telling but that His Majesty of Ulster, Congal the Perverse [i.e., Betham], is giving vast annoyance to the Antiquarian Druid [i.e., Petrie]. He has also, I understand, thrown vast difficulties in the way of the Ordnance Memoir by personal exertions in London. I can nearly believe that he has made an impression on the mind of Sir Robert Peel, both by speaking and writing, as can scarcely be removed by the party who are for the Memoir—Tory and influential as they confessedly are! What a majestic warrior his Majesty of Ulster is! What an admirable leader he would have been in the time of William Fitz-Adelm in Connaught! He spoke for two hours against the poor Antiquary last night, but was most ably met by Sam Ferguson (the Forger of the Anchor), who explained the cause of all his Majesty's opposition to the Antiquary, and actually drove his Majesty out of the room by the keenness and vigour of his tongue. This was griffin against lion rampant! The wiverns, hawks, and choughs looked on and chuckled with delight at the battle but took very little part in it."

From various sources and at different

times Trinity College and the Royal Irish Academy had acquired a considerable number of Irish Manuscripts. To mention but a few, they possessed the originals of the *Book of Armagh*, the *Leabhar na h-Uidhre*, the *Book of Leinster*, the *Leabhar Breac*, the *Book of Lecan*, the *Yellow Book of Lecan*, the holograph copy of the Four Masters; and as early as 1836 O'Donovan commenced the catalogue of the Manuscripts in Trinity College, just as later O'Curry, whose work was completed by O'Longan, commenced his famous catalogue of the Royal Irish Academy Manuscripts.

Todd was anxious, however, that O'Donovan's great powers should not be confined to the routine work of cataloguing, but that he should be enabled to devote himself to the translation and editing of Irish texts. To this end he got the Royal Irish Academy to apply in 1836 to the Chancellor of the Exchequer for a grant to aid him in his patriotic undertaking. The application, as may be expected, produced no result, and then Todd decided to start the Irish Archæological Society so that private enterprise might in some way make up for the failure in duty of a so-called paternal government.

It was the commencement of that long series of Societies, which, founded by the people themselves, were to do for the modern

Irish scholar what the ancient Irish chiefs and abbots did for the “ollamh” in the good days of yore.

The refusal in 1836 to give a grant in aid for the editing of Irish manuscripts was followed up in 1842 by the suppression of the Historical Department of the Ordnance Survey. This marked a turning-point in the life of O'Donovan. His great work on the Survey was thus brought peremptorily to a close; but we can scarcely regret it when we consider that it left him free to enter upon that career of original investigation and editing of our manuscript literature which opened a new chapter in the history of the origins of European civilisation.

It is a mistake to think that the antiquarian spirit is opposed to interest in living human things; it is rather the over-flow of the humanistic spirit, and is found in its highest development in men who have the keenest relish for the study of man as he is — *Homo sum, nihil humani a me alienum puto*; it is a healthy antidote to the wretched circumscription of many contemporary writers; it widens man's horizon and teaches him that he is the heir of all the ages. I have noted before, in dealing with his Letters, O'Donovan's keen interest in the humours of the characters he happened on in his journeying. He

introduces us to a motley, Chaucerian crowd, representative types of the Irish population in pre-famine days ; priest, parson, Presbyterian minister, landlords and their tenants, farmer and peasant ; and he expresses himself with a freedom and a directness, and with a lively sense of humour that recalls the attitude of mind, if not exactly the manner, of the morning-star of English song. What the working out of such a vein would have led him to, I will not here venture to say. His energies were diverted into more purely learned channels by the influence of Hardiman and more especially of Petrie.

Petrie was a man of wide culture and of great artistic tastes, and one likely to exercise an overwhelming influence on the young Irish boy whose sound judgment early recognised in him a master and a safe guide. The life-work of Petrie lay in the department of Antiquities, and it is no wonder therefore that O'Donovan caught to the full the spirit of his first chief ; nor need we be surprised at finding him referring in the following words to Petrie as " the most distinguished antiquary in Ireland, from whom he first acquired whatever skill he possesses in the distinguishing History from Fable."

In addition to the Archæological Society founded by Todd, a second Society, the



Celtic, was started in 1847. Todd had avowed his intention of winning over the Irish nobility and gentry to some feeling of pride in the past of the country from which they derived their incomes. We meet, therefore, with a decidedly formidable, if not popular, array of names on the first Council and member list of the Archæological Society. The popular party evidently felt slighted, and the Celtic Society was started with the Rev. Laurence O'Renehan, of Maynooth, as President, whilst on the Council we find the names of Daniel O'Connell, M.P., and William Smith O'Brien, M.P. John O'Daly later became Secretary. The two Societies ultimately amalgamated and formed a new one called the Irish Archæological and Celtic Society. It is sufficient to say that these Societies enabled O'Donovan to launch his editions of Irish texts on the market, and that Ireland owes a debt of gratitude to those of their members who supported them by their subscriptions.

Anyone familiar with O'Donovan's letters will remember how fond he was of tracing the genealogies of Irish families; we frequently find him in bantering mood signing himself as : John the son of Edmund, the son of Edmund, the son of William, the son of Cornelius, and so on, and it was therefore "con amore" that he set himself to edit

*The Tribes and Customs of Hy Many, of Hy Fiachrach, and of ancient Ossory.* Membership of a tribe, be it remembered, depended on proving one's genealogy, and it is therefore not surprising to find much material for the history of Irish families in our manuscripts. Even in O'Donovan's time—witness his encounter with John O'Dogherty of Bree in Inishowen, as narrated in a letter of August 21st, 1835—men were to be met with who could recite the list of their forbears back to the first founder of the family. Besides these genealogical tracts, he edited the *Topographical Poems* of O'Dubhagain and O'Heerin, and the *Circuit of Ireland by Muirchertach Mac Neill*. Here he found himself peculiarly at home, and we find him lavishly displaying that wealth of knowledge of Irish place-names, the foundation of which was laid in his work on the Ordnance Survey. His editions of the *Banquet of Dun na nGedh* and of the *Battle of Magh Rath* display his powers as an editor of Irish saga literature; to the latter work he prefixed a critical dissertation on Irish Epic prose style in which he unreservedly condemns the turgid manner of the later sagas: his criticism of the style is fundamental, and nothing better has been said about it since his time. From the same work we may be

pardoned for quoting a criticism of Moore's *History of Ireland*, if only as a warning to those who would write the History of the Irish people without consulting the race's records of its own life as contained in the native Irish manuscripts: "Mr. Moore," he says, "is confessedly unacquainted with the Irish language; and the remains of our ancient literature were therefore, of course, inaccessible to him. That great ignorance of these unexplored sources of Irish history should be found in his pages is, therefore, not surprising; but he ought to have been more conscious of his deficiencies, than to have so boldly hazarded the unqualified assertion that there exist in the Irish Annals no materials for the civil history of the country."

Amongst his remaining contributions to the publications of these Societies were the *Leabhar na gCeart* and the *Martyrology of Donegal*; and it is to be feared that Moore's fancy would not be caught by such erudite works as these, which would scarcely harmonise with his melodious rendering of our history.

## CHAPTER IV

### ANNALS OF THE FOUR MASTERS

WHILST thus actively engaged in the editing and translation of texts for the Irish Societies O'Donovan was occupied in the preparation of the two works by which he is perhaps best known—the *Irish Grammar* and his edition and translation of the *Annals of the Four Masters*. His study of Latin must have directed his attention at an early age to the apparent instability of Irish grammatical forms; the printed literature in Irish at the beginning of the last century was scant indeed, and the spelling of the grammatical forms not well defined. O'Donovan set himself to normalise the heterogeneous collection of spellings and forms which the manuscript literature presented. He did not intend the grammar to be a phonetic replica of the colloquial dialects then existing, and hence his scheme was to register historical forms, and not drifting colloquial ones. It was a splendid performance at the time; it preceded the great work of Zeuss—*Jupiter Tonans*, as O'Donovan calls him—and any defect it has is due to the fact that he had not the advantage, which a worker in the same field would

possess to-day, of having a library of detailed and specialised works on every feature of Celtic grammar.

The holograph copy of the *Annals of the Four Masters* was procured for the Royal Irish Academy by George Petrie in the year 1832.

O'Donovan recognised it at once as a work in the editing of which he would be enabled to display the best qualities of his scholarship, covering as it did the field of Irish history up to 1616. In a characteristic letter to Hardiman, written in the year 1839, he thus proclaims with pardonable egotism his fitness for the work: "The Royal Irish Academy have, it seems, at length come to the resolution of publishing the *Annals of the Four Masters* from beginning to end at the suggestion, it appears, of the Lord Lieutenant. This is good news for me, if they do not attempt to make a cat's paw of me, but that they will hardly succeed in doing as long as I have as much as will keep me from starving. I defy them to get any one else who knows all the topography, and is acquainted with all the fairies and banshees of Ireland. If they do not pay me well, they may go to the devil, and I say to them 'non vobis vigilavi.'"

The work was published by Mr. George Smith, the Dublin publisher, at his own

expense in magnificent style, and is a lasting tribute to his practical patriotism. The first part, for the years 1172 to 1616, appeared in 1848, and the second part dealing with the earlier period appeared in 1851. O'Donovan, though its editor, was no slavish admirer of it; he recognised it as an excellent outline of the history of the country, but his fingers itched to give the dry details a human touch from the wealth of historical and legendary anecdote of which he was the repository. In presenting Hardiman with a copy we find him thus frankly expressing himself in a letter dated June 7th, 1847: "They [i.e., Hardiman's works] will throw considerable light on the barren context of the Four Masters, who appear to me to have courted the muse of History with great coldness. I often regret that I am not at liberty to infuse some of my own wickedness into the text, but the sacred cause of truth will oblige me to give them to the world in the barren style of the original." Notwithstanding this, O'Donovan would have been the first to admit the truth of his friend Sam Ferguson's remarks when, in a review of the *Annals*, comparing the origins of the literature of the Greeks with that of the Irish, he says: "Our cattle spoils and histories, our family pedigrees, royal and princely successions are as precious to us

now as theirs were to them then. We will treasure them as they did; and the time may yet come when our Egypt herself will thank us for having cherished the seeds of a new Literature after her own may possibly have fallen into decay."

In the editing of the *Annals* O'Donovan had the assistance of his distinguished contemporary and brother-in-law Eugene O'Curry. Both these men had to create their own schools and to attract the attention of the learned of their own country and of Europe to a subject hitherto totally neglected. It was not, therefore, till practically in the last decade of O'Donovan's life that any public recognition of the great scholar's work was bestowed on him. His *Grammar*, published in 1845, elicited at once the praise of Bopp and Grimm; and later in 1856 he was, on the recommendation of Grimm, elected a corresponding member of the Royal Academy of Berlin, an honour which he shared with Caspar Zeuss, whose *Grammatica Celtica* had appeared in that year. The publication of the first part of his edition of the *Annals of the Four Masters* in 1848 won for him the Cunningham Gold Medal of the Royal Irish Academy as well as the Honorary LL.D. of Trinity College, whilst its completion induced the Government to bestow on him

a pension of £50 a year. In the meantime he was chosen as Professor of Celtic in the Queen's College, Belfast, which, with the Examinership in Celtic given to him in 1852, made his income from all sources £170 a year—the beggarly monetary reward of a life-time of enduring work.

It is no wonder, therefore, that he meditated at this time emigrating to America, the home of so many of his exiled countrymen, with numbers of whom, as he himself tells us, he kept up a voluminous correspondence. But his services were retained for Ireland during the remaining years of his life by the establishment of the Brehon Law Commission. He had already been called to the Bar and had, therefore, attained a certain knowledge of legal technicalities which would help him in interpreting the niceties of the Brehon Code. It was a daring undertaking, and it is ever to be regretted that Whitley Stokes, whose work on Indian Law is a classic, did not devote himself at some time or other to the perfecting and revising of the work of his famous predecessors and fellow-countrymen, O'Donovan and O'Curry. Up to his death O'Donovan was engaged upon the Brehon Law Tracts. They were published after his death, and therefore without his revision.

As far back as 1834 we find O'Donovan



complaining of rheumatism contracted through exposure on the work of the Ordnance Survey. In the midst of his work on the Brehon Laws he was stricken down with rheumatic fever, and died at midnight on the 9th of December, 1861. He was attended in his last illness by his old school-mate Father Nicholas O'Farrell, C.C., of Marlborough Street, and later Parish Priest of Lusk. He was buried in Glasnevin, where a simple stone with an inscription in Irish letters marks his grave. But six months afterwards O'Curry followed his colleague to the grave, and the cause of Irish studies seemed to have suffered an irreparable loss: "O'Donovan and O'Curry," says Dr. Reeves, "gone!—and Dr. Todd in poor health and Whitley Stokes thousands of miles away; it seems to me as if a black curtain had fallen over the sunny scene and the lively movement which Irish Literature presented a short time ago."

I fear that I have failed to bring adequately before the reader of this short essay the greatness of the work O'Donovan did for Ireland. He caught the warm glow of a tradition that famine was soon to impair and gave it an immortality in his work. He devoted talents which would have won him renown in any field to the revealing of the wealth of the Literature that lay unnoticed

in the libraries of Oxford, of the British Museum, and of Ireland. His powerful influence helped to lend to the Irish political party of his day a poetic idealism which was an inspiration to them and is still an inspiration to us. The circle of his influence embraced men of all creeds and of all classes, and all were united in one thing—in admiration of the greatness of his scholarship. He evoked from hill and glen, from river and cave, from ancient dún and medieval fortress and ruined church the historic or legendary associations of their names. He laid the foundation of a true History of his Country and of her Laws. He found her crooning the weird stories of her past by the turf-fire, and he left her with the copies of the title-deeds of her glory deposited in the libraries of Europe :

“ He toiled to make our story stand  
As from Time’s reverent, runic hand  
It came undecked  
By fancies false, erect, alone,  
The monumental arctic stone  
Of ages wrecked.  
Kings that were dead two thousand years,  
Cross-bearing chiefs and pagan seers,  
He knew them all ;  
And bards whose very harps were dust,  
And saints whose souls are with the just,  
Came at his call.”





**EUGENE O'CURRY.**  
*(From a Photograph.)*

## CHAPTER V

### DUBLIN, HOME OF THE REVIVAL

THE end of the eighteenth century saw the close of a brilliant period in the history of Modern Irish Poetry. The disappearance of the native Irish aristocracy, consequent on the wars of 1641 and 1688-1691, left the people without territorial leaders, and led them to seek inspiration in imaginative retrospect—in a poetry, written by men of the people, for the people, and in a metre which possessed in its union of stress accent with the older alliterative and assonantal system qualities which made a peculiar appeal to the sensitive ear of the Irish-speaking population. Thanks to the labours of Father Dinneen and others attention has been again called to the importance of this chapter in the history of Irish poetry. Father Dinneen especially deserves great credit for the persistence with which he has claimed for eighteenth-century lyric qualities which interest not merely the archæologist but also the humanist and critic of poetic art. He had, however, predecessors in the persons of appreciative translators or adapters. Wilson and Miss Brooks in the eighteenth century ; in the nineteenth

century, Hardiman, John O'Daly, and Edward Walsh, Jeremiah Callanan, Clarence Mangan, and Cornelius MacSweeney, Charles Gavan Duffy, Thomas Davis, Henry Montgomery, and Dr. Sigerson, President of the National Literary Society, whose poetic renderings of the songs of the Munster bards convinced at least one of his readers, at an early age, of the intrinsic worth of Irish Jacobite lyrics. Into the fabric of Irish life in the eighteenth century strands from the past were interwoven, and the lyric of that time is instinct with historical reminiscence as well as actual reference. The national memory never forgot the great figures of the Cuchulain and Ossianic cycles, and the Irish-speaking people never found any incongruity in a full appreciation of the heroic qualities of a Cuchulain and a Finn, with a higher and, in a spiritual sense, different appreciation of the heroism of a Columba. This catholicity of Irish manuscript literature is most striking and reflects the peculiar temper of the Celt—his receptivity—his power of retaining past traditions and of giving them living application to the present. The influence of a passionate imagination, in the case of the great lyric poets, did much to maintain the old literary tradition, the extinction of which was threatened by the

passing away of the endowed scholarship of the O'Clerys and MacFirbises. For to my mind scholarship and great imaginative literature are not as divorced as some would lead us to think. Without scholarship certain forms of popular lyric may flourish, but the tendency otherwise will be towards a neurotic impressionism or a florid rhetoric, devoid of substance and of thought. The popular lyric of the eighteenth century, when at its best, derived its inspiration and its power from the intensity of the national struggle for existence, or from the strongly felt personal griefs and joys of the poets themselves; but the literature of that century would have been of much wider range had it been supported by contemporary representatives of the great schools and scholars of the past. Yet the tradition of Irish scholarship was not completely lost, despite the oppressive enactments of the Penal Laws. Here and there an Irishman was to be found who nursed a passion for the monuments of Ireland's early history. Charles O'Connor, of Balanagar, with the encouragement of that great Englishman, Dr. Samuel Johnson, devoted himself to the study of Irish manuscript literature; but, with the best will in the world, he was unable to cope with the problems that confront the scholar in every

page of Irish text, whilst the time was scarcely ripe to produce an audience fit to appreciate his labours. It was, as I have pointed out elsewhere, the growth of the romantic temper in European literature and, in a more direct way, the stir created by the publication of MacPherson's *Ossian* that renewed the interest in Celtic origins and prepared a home for O'Curry and O'Donovan in Dublin—the centre of the English-speaking Pale. The new temper, represented by Gray's *Odes*, by Burns' *Scotch Ballads*, by Percy's *Reliques*, by MacPherson's *Ossian*, and later by Scott's *Lays* and, above all, by Moore's *Melodies*, modified the literary temper of the old Georgian capital. The Celt began to win sympathisers amidst the families of the Pale. A Beresford and a Whaley were to be succeeded by a Petrie and a Todd, and the stuccoed mansions of a cultured tyranny—cemented, as they were, with the sweat and blood of a Celtic people—were to become the homes of the priceless manuscript collections of the Royal Irish Academy and of the Catholic University. The gradual conquest of Dublin, its rise as a centre of Celtic studies, is, to my mind, one of the noblest episodes in the history of Ireland. It is a phase of the struggle for the emancipation of the Irish people. That



struggle is not yet ended, but it has become in our own day not so much a struggle with forces outside of ourselves as a struggle with ourselves—a struggle to retain something of our partially lost inheritance and a struggle to achieve a fuller realisation and expression of our individual national mind. There is something, therefore, symbolical in the fact that the leader of the Irish Volunteers should have been the first President of the Royal Irish Academy.

In tracing the growth of the literary and archæological movement in Dublin it is important to remember that it was this movement which in later years was to react on the Irish-speaking districts. The foundation of the Gaelic Society, whose volume of *Transactions* appeared in 1808, marked the opening of the new century. It began to be felt that something should be done to reveal the wealth of song and story lying hidden in the great national manuscripts. If MacPherson's famous forgery or partial forgery did nothing else it succeeded in stimulating an interest in Ossianic saga, and it is interesting to note that the first volume of the *Transactions* of the Royal Irish Academy, published in 1787, contains translations, by Dr. Young, of Scotch Ossianic poems. From the opening of the nineteenth century to the coming of

O'Donovan and O'Curry a certain amount of grammatical and lexicographical work appeared. This included the work of Owen Connellan, and the small *English-Irish Dictionary* of Thaddaeus Connellan (1814) and his bilingual *Grammar* (1825), and, in 1817, the *Irish-English Dictionary* of Edward O'Reilly. This latter was based on Tadhg O'Nachten's manuscript *Dictionary* and on the *Dictionary of Scottish Gaelic* by Shaw. The preface shows the influence of the quaintly absurd theories of Vallancey and Betham—theories which were shattered by the more accurate scholarship of O'Curry and O'Donovan. The list of subscribers is a curious document. It contains the names of men of diverse reputation and political temper. It is interesting to note that the *Alma Mater* of Eugene O'Growney, Maynooth College, supplies a solid phalanx of fifty priests and student-subscribers, headed by the Reverend Doctor Bartholomew Crotty, President of the College, whilst the Right Honorable Henry Grattan and Daniel O'Connell, Esq., of Merrion Square, find themselves in the company of the Right Hon. Lord Norbury, Chief Justice of the Common Pleas, and of Leonard McNally, Esq., of Harcourt Street.

During these first years of the century, whilst Grattan and O'Connell were fighting

the battle of political and religious freedom, two young men, the one in Kilkenny, the other in Clare, were cultivating a knowledge of the Irish language which was to make of them the future champions of the literary and historical glories of their country. O'Donovan came to Dublin, in 1826, with an introduction from James Scurry to James Hardiman. Edward O'Reilly died in 1829, and it was on the evening of the 7th January, 1832, that young O'Donovan, with a letter of introduction from Larcom, the head of the Ordnance Survey, called on Petrie in Great Charles Street. Petrie, as O'Donovan says, received him with great kindness and presented him with his copy of Cormac's *Glossary*. It was practically his initiation, as successor to O'Reilly, into the work of the Ordnance Survey. At the same time O'Curry was devoting every spare moment to the study of Irish, whilst endeavouring to eke out a livelihood as an employe in the Lunatic Asylum at Limerick.

## CHAPTER VI

### O'CURRY'S POSITION IN THE IRISH REVIVAL

EUGENE O'CURRY was born in the year 1794, at Dunaha, in the County of Clare.\* From his father, Owen Mór, to whose great traditional knowledge of Irish literature and music his son never tired of referring, O'Curry derived that inner sympathy and living acquaintance with the literature of his country, which could only be found in an Irishman to the manner born. The county of Donnchadh O'Daly, of Andrew MacCurtin, of Michael Comyn, and of Brian Merriman, was then practically a purely Irish-speaking one, and O'Curry grew up amidst a people whose literary recreation was the recitation of Irish saga, of Ossianic lays, and the singing of Jacobite songs. The war with Napoleon seems to have reacted favourably on Irish agriculture, and the boyhood of O'Curry was passed in comparative comfort. But, in 1815, Owen Mór O'Curry gave up his farm and retired to Limerick, where his son

\* This is the first time the correct date is given. It is proved from the following entry which I found in O'Curry MSS., Maynooth, 2. G. 8. p. 56: "I was born at Dunaha West, about three miles south of Kilkee, on the 11th November, 1794."

obtained a position in the Lunatic Asylum. It is strange to think of the future Professor at the Catholic University in Dublin, one of the best known Irish scholars of his day, passing twenty years of his life in such uncongenial surroundings. Yet it was no unmixed blessing that kept him in touch with his native county of Clare. He seems early to have earned a local reputation as an authority on the Irish language, and as a collector of Irish manuscripts; and when Mr. George Smith, of the firm of Hodges and Smith, Dublin, received a commission to purchase Irish manuscripts for the Royal Irish Academy collection, he was fortunate in being introduced by the medical superintendent of the Asylum to Eugene O'Curry. Through Smith, O'Curry received an invitation to join the Ordnance Survey staff, under Petrie, and he came to Dublin and entered on his duties in November, 1835. We find O'Donovan sending a characteristic letter from Ballyconnel dated September 10th, 1835, to Mr. Curry, Limerick, and addressing him familiarly as "My dear Eugenius." It is a striking commentary on the labours of these two great men to think that at this time O'Donovan could have written to O'Curry asking him had he ever heard of Balor Bémenn; and to imagine how the O'Donovan

and the O'Curry of later years would have opened their eyes in astonishment at any Irish scholar who would profess ignorance of "Him of the Mighty Blows."

There has always seemed to me something appropriate in the fact that it was on the rising ground stretching from the mouth of the Tolka River towards Mountjoy Square and Phibsboro', the scene of Brian's great victory in 1014, that the little army of Irish scholars encamped and commenced the battle for the recognition of the historic and literary glories of Ireland's past. In Summer Hill lived John D'Alton; in Gardiner Street, James Hardiman; in Bayview Avenue, Newcomen Place, and later in Buckingham Street, John O'Donovan; in Portland Street, O'Curry; in Summer Street the O'Longans, whilst in 21 Great Charles Street, in the house of George Petrie, was the office of the Historical Department of the Ordnance Survey. In the centre of this district, in the year 1828, O'Connell laid the foundation stone of the famous O'Connell Schools, or, as they are sometimes called, Richmond Street Schools. Here the children of O'Curry and O'Longan received their early education, and, as an *alumnus* of these schools, I am in a position to state that the spirit of devotion to Ireland was ever to be found in them. You will pardon me, I am

sure, if I lay so much stress upon the spirit and atmosphere of the time. To us, Irishmen, the history of Irish studies is not the history of philological dissection of a *corpus vile*, it is the history of the living soul of Ireland, and we turn to it to awaken and keep alive in ourselves the enthusiasms which animated the best representatives of our race.

The appointment of O'Curry to the staff of the Ordnance Survey, in 1835, made it possible to create a division of labour between himself and O'Donovan. O'Donovan was a born topographer, whilst O'Curry's tastes lay in the domain of textual criticism and in that of the history of Irish literature and culture. Not that O'Donovan was by any means of the dry-as-dust order of scholars. As I have pointed out elsewhere, his wondrous collection of letters is full of sparkling wit and vivacious criticism of men and things; and, as he himself tells us, his fingers itched to enliven the sober details of the *Annals of the Four Masters* with the quips and cranks of his own imaginative fancy. Whilst O'Donovan was away in the country making investigations on the spot into the forms of Irish place-names and the traditions associated with them, O'Curry remained at home supplying him with illustrative extracts

from ancient Irish manuscripts. This enabled him to become early familiar with the chief manuscripts in the Royal Irish Academy and Trinity College, and laid the foundation of that general knowledge of their scope and contents which, it may be safely said, has never since been equalled by any single scholar. The story of his life is the story of the patient investigation of the national manuscripts of Ireland which in him found their first adequate interpreter. Almost immediately on his arrival in Dublin he set himself to the task of copying the great vellum manuscripts which fortunately had escaped the ravages of time. As early as 1836 he made a copy for the Royal Irish Academy of the manuscript containing the Genealogies compiled by Duaid MacFirbis, which was then in the possession of the Earl of Roden.\* For the Royal Irish Academy O'Curry also made a copy of the *Book of Lismore*, whilst he enriched the library of Trinity College with copies of the *Book of Lecan*, the *Leabhar Breac* and the *Leabhar na h-Uidhre*—the latter left uncompleted at his death. O'Curry was no slavish transcriber however. A mere catalogue of the pieces copied by him would fill many a page, but, apart from

\* The original manuscript is now in the possession of the Right Honorable Michael F. Cox.



his official transcriptions, he had the habit of noting whatever struck him as throwing light on the manners and customs of the Irish people. An adequate idea of the written sources of his masterly lectures can only be had by those who have worked through the volumes of extracts which he has left behind him. Fresh, as I myself am, from the cataloguing of one collection of his unpublished transcriptions and translations, I am, perhaps, in a peculiarly favourable position to estimate the gigantic labour of the man. The oldest and most difficult texts seemed but to whet his curiosity and to awaken in him the desire to make them yield their long-hidden secrets. In this respect he out-distanced O'Donovan, whose labours, if we except the *Brehon Laws*, lay in a region where textual difficulties were not so great. And it must always be remembered that it was only in the last ten years of his life that O'Curry had the advantage of having at his command the great Grammar of Zeuss. When one considers the difficulties that beset the path of a textual editor, even in our day, one can only wonder that the mistakes made by him were not a thousand times greater than they were.

From 1835 till the suppression of the Historical Department of the Ordnance Survey he was mostly engaged on the

manuscripts of Trinity College and the Royal Irish Academy. By that time he had become familiar with the contents of the great vellum codices, and had, as I have said, acquired an encyclopædic knowledge of their subject-matter—a knowledge sufficient to make clear to him that what was most urgently needed was a general résumé of their contents and a key to their language in the shape of a dictionary and of a collection of the ancient glossaries. He must have frequently seen the valuable *Dictionary* of Peter O'Connell, which was begun in 1785 and completed in 1819. O'Connell's *Dictionary* has been a mine from which editors of Irish texts have derived material help, sometimes, indeed, without acknowledgment. Born at Carna, in the Co. Clare, O'Connell was a frequent visitor at Eoghan Mór O'Curry's house, not ten miles distant from his own, and it was he who introduced the future Professor to those more difficult and earlier forms of the language which men like O'Flanagan took to be a peculiar dialect of Irish. O'Curry tried later to procure the *Dictionary*. It had been pledged by O'Connell in Tralee, was purchased by Hardiman, and sold by the latter to the British Museum. We possess however copies of it, by O'Donovan, in the Royal Irish Academy and in Trinity

College. The knowledge thus gained by young O'Curry threw a new light on the modern Irish language and literature. He must have come to recognise that the historic names occurring in the lyrics and folk-tales of the eighteenth century enshrined the memories of a great past; and that that past could not be adequately revealed till the records of it in the ancient tongue of Ireland were made known to a public up till then sadly ignorant of them. It was at this time that the famous interview between O'Curry and Tom Moore took place—an interview which showed at once the honesty of Moore, and the impression which the work of the great Irish scholar made upon the most talented Irishman of his day. The time has not even as yet arrived for the writing of an exhaustive history of the Irish people. Many of the histories we possess present but a ghastly outline of their real life; when a synthesis of that life is effected it will be found to contain, as an integral and most important part, the results of the line of work which O'Curry and O'Donovan opened up. O'Curry joined the Ordnance Survey in 1835 and specialised in manuscript work rather than in work in the field. It would, however, be a mistake to think that he did not contribute to the famous *Survey*

*Letters*, more popularly known as O'Donovan's *Letters*. For example, the *Wicklow Letters* contain quite a number sent by him to Larcom, with interesting accounts of the places he visited and of the incidents he met with in his tours. Larcom, the head of the Survey, seems to have been anything but an official martinet, and he evidently encouraged and enjoyed O'Donovan and O'Curry's quaint remarks in their letters on men, places, the weather, and things in general. In fact, the men of the mid-nineteenth century seem to have been by no means a heavy-footed race—they took their scholarship seriously but themselves not too much so. Witness the echoes of the wit-combats of O'Donovan, Mangan, Meehan, Gilbert, and Wakeman—hearsay for many of us, echoes for some of us, perchance a memory for a few.

It should be remembered in apportioning the praise due to O'Donovan for his magnificent collection of *Letters* that it was O'Curry's aid, in sending him illustrative extracts, that helped O'Donovan to solve the topographical and historical difficulties presented to him in the places he visited. As an example of the thoroughness with which these two men did their work, and of the aid which they gave to one another, I may instance the following. On March

30th, 1840, we find O'Donovan writing to Larcom from Glendalough, explaining to him his reason for delaying in that historic spot, and the reason he gives is that he is waiting to get from O'Curry a copy of the *Life of St. Kevin*, "in order," he says, "to compare it with the topography of the district." It may interest the general public to know that it is in this volume of the *Letters* that O'Donovan clears St. Kevin of the crime of having drowned the famous Kathleen, and proves that the punishment went no further than a scourging with nettles! As a further example of the way in which topographical and manuscript research went hand in hand at this time, I may quote the following passage from O'Curry's *Manuscript Materials*; speaking of the *Féilire of Aengus*, he says: "It was during the progress of the late Ordnance Survey that this tract came first into notice, and it is no ordinary satisfaction to me to have to say that I was the first person in modern times that discovered the value of its contents when, under the able superintendence of Col. Larcom and Dr. Petrie, I brought them to bear with important results on the topographical section of that great national undertaking."

"This great national undertaking," as O'Curry calls it, came to an end in 1842,

owing to the action of the Government of the day, which, it is said, feared the effect of it in re-awakening the national spirit in Ireland. Fortunately, Government bureaus are not the custodians of the national spirit ; and patriotic private effort made up for the loss of State aid. Two movements, the one scholarly, the other popular, came into being at this time. The foundation of the Irish Archæological Society in 1840, of the Celtic Society in 1845, of the Irish Archæological and Celtic Society and of the Ossianic Society, in 1854, gave an opportunity to O'Donovan and O'Curry of making known to the general public some of the scholarly results of their labours. At the same time the *Nation* newspaper, founded in 1842 by Thomas Davis and Charles Gavan Duffy, as the organ of the Young Ireland Party, willingly lent its aid in popularising the new world of Irish life revealed in the ancient manuscripts of Ireland, and in giving it an emotional and poetic setting. The poets of the *Nation* naturally sought in ancient tradition a spur to political passion, and their poetry, at its best, glows with the white heat of a pure patriotism. On the other hand, the work of O'Curry and O'Donovan created in men like Ferguson a desire for a more detached and literary treatment. And here I should like to make a

slight critical remark. One of the things which we must admire in O'Curry is his belief in the *intrinsic* value of Irish literature. To him English was more or less an acquired language, and hence, in rendering Irish sagas and poems into English, he was in an inverse position to most modern translators—he was translating from his native language, Irish, into an acquired language, English; most of the moderns translate from an acquired language—Irish—into their “native” language, English. In rendering, therefore, Irish sagas and poems into English he must have felt how inadequate his versions were. It is a commonplace to say that even the best translations fail to render adequately their original; but let me say this that, personally, I infinitely prefer O'Curry's straightforward, if old-fashioned, versions to much of the smirking preciosity and sophistication of certain moderns. I am perfectly certain that Cuchulain and Queen Maeve would howl with anger if they came across some of the modern caricatures of their august persons. The desire to improve on the original is to be found in those who know it only in translation and who know it, on that account, imperfectly. The growth of Irish scholarship during the last fifty years or so has made it

possible for many of us to read the Irish sagas and poems in the original, and the result is a return to the belief of O'Curry—the belief in the intrinsic value of Irish literature.

## CHAPTER VII

### O'CURRY'S VAST LABOURS ON IRISH TEXTS

FROM 1835 to 1842 the work of O'Curry and O'Donovan was in great measure directed by the requirements of the Ordnance Survey. The results are to be found embodied in the *Survey Letters* and in papers such as Petrie's on the *Antiquities of Tara Hill*, which appeared as early as 1837 in the *Transactions* of the Royal Irish Academy. From 1840 on O'Donovan continued his publication of his editions of Irish texts for the Archæological Societies, his *Grammar of the Irish Language*, and his monumental edition of the *Annals of the Four Masters*. O'Curry bent himself to the task of acquiring a knowledge of the whole range of Irish manuscript literature. For the performance of such a task nothing could have been more favourable than the work which he now undertook. It was felt that the time had come for cataloguing the great collec-



tion of manuscripts in the Royal Irish Academy. The publication of isolated texts, chosen without a full knowledge of the actual range of the manuscript literature, was likely to lead to a want of perspective. O'Donovan had, as early as 1836, commenced his catalogue of the manuscripts in Trinity College, but he left it uncompleted in 1840.

In 1842 the Council of the Royal Irish Academy employed O'Curry to compile a catalogue of their manuscripts; and thus was inaugurated that wondrous task carried out by O'Curry, contributed to by Owen Connellan and O'Beirne Crowe, and completed by the great Index Catalogue of O'Longan, which lies still, in manuscript, on the shelves of the Royal Irish Academy. I have heard from time to time egotistical editors of a few pages of easy Irish complain of some small defect in this gigantic work, but I prefer the testimony of Mr. Purton, of the Royal Irish Academy, who has been for many years in daily contact with it and who declares its accuracy wonderful. Some of my readers are, no doubt, quite familiar with this catalogue, but, for the sake of those who are not, it is well to point out that it is a descriptive one. The plan adopted was, in the first place, to give an account, if possible, of the origin and history of each manuscript, and then to

give an analysis of each tale, poem, or tract that occurs in the manuscript. For example, in Volume II of the "Academy" Catalogue there are 386 pages, and of these 225 pages are devoted to an analysis of the contents of the great Middle-Irish manuscript—the *Leabhar Breac*. You will see, therefore, that such work as this entailed the enormous labour of reading each and every poem, tale or tract, in each and every one of the manuscripts. I take a particular pleasure in thus emphasizing the greatness of the work of men like O'Donovan, O'Curry, and O'Longan, for it has frequently been exploited by others without sufficient and, at times, without any acknowledgment. As an example of this I should like to point, though for certain reasons I feel some diffidence in doing so, to those peerless specimens of facsimile reproduction of the great vellum manuscripts by O'Longan. Take, for instance, the facsimile of the *Book of Leinster*. To this the late Dr. Atkinson prefixed an Introduction and analysis of contents—a good piece of work though not altogether his. The *raison d'être* of the Introduction was the facsimile of the manuscript by O'Longan. One would have imagined that O'Longan's name should have appeared upon the title-page, but the real worker is re-

legated to an obscure position in the tail-end of the Introduction, whilst the title-page tells, in no modest way, the legend that the work is "The Book of Leinster," *et cetera*, with Introduction, *et cetera*, by Robert Atkinson, *et cetera*. The result is that I have seen it ignorantly referred to as the *Book of Leinster* by Robert Atkinson. Somewhat the same treatment was meted out to O'Longan in the case of the *Leabhar na h-Uidhre*, *Leabhar Breac* and *Book of Ballymote*.

But to return to the Catalogue. There are four catalogues of manuscripts in the Royal Irish Academy—the first, technically called the "Academy" Catalogue as it deals with the Academy's original collection of manuscripts; the second, the "Hodges and Smith" Catalogue, dealing with the collection of manuscripts acquired through that firm; the third, the "Betham" Catalogue—so named from Sir William Betham; and the fourth, the "Miscellaneous" Catalogue. The first, the "Academy" Catalogue, O'Curry commenced in November, 1842. It consists of three large folio volumes totalling 1,092 pages of closely written description. The second volume O'Curry finished on the 12th February, 1844, adding the following note: "This ends my description of the *Leabhar Breac* [covering pages

527-752] and whatever light I have been able to throw on its contents it will be seen that I have not spared any labour or trouble." The third volume has no date. Concomitantly with the writing of the descriptive "Academy" Catalogue O'Curry commenced that of the Hodges and Smith collection. This consists of two folio volumes, containing 519 pages, of which Vol. I is dated 1843. Finally, of the five folio volumes of the "Betham" Catalogue, O'Curry wrote two, amounting to 561 pages. Vol. III was written by Owen Connellan and Joseph O'Longan, and vols. IV, and V by O'Longan. The "Miscellaneous" Catalogue, it may be mentioned, is the work of poor O'Beirne Crowe, whilst the great Index Catalogue, in 13 large folio volumes, is the work of Joseph O'Longan. I trust I may be pardoned for going into these details, for it is, I believe, the only way to give an idea of portion of the enormous work carried out by these industrious Irishmen of a past generation.

From 1844 to 1849 O'Curry still continued to transcribe and translate Irish texts. Most of these remain unpublished or have been made the basis of editions by later scholars. For proof of his generous aid to his contemporaries one has only to consult the Introductions to practically every work

dealing with the native literature or history of Ireland published between the years 1840 and 1862. To the *Grammar* of his colleague O'Donovan he supplied illustrations of Thomond forms ; he assisted him in the preparation of the text of the *Annals of the Four Masters*, whilst for the edition of the *Leabhar na g-Ceart* he transcribed the texts from the *Book of Ballymote* and the *Book of Lecan*. Without the assistance of O'Curry and O'Donovan men like Petrie, Todd, Graves, and Reeves would have been utterly helpless. "Should you see Mr. MacDowell again," writes Petrie to O'Curry, on 28th August, 1855, "pray remember me kindly to him, and tell him that I am getting on with the second volume—that is to say, between ourselves, as well as I can without having you beside me. But in truth, except in the way of preparation, I can do nothing of consequence till I have you again to aid me." To bring home to you the kind of aid afforded by O'Curry, aid often acknowledged in some stereotyped phrase in an Introduction full of the man's own thought and work, let me refer to Adamnan's scholarly Latin *Life of St. Columba*, edited by Dr. Reeves for the Irish Archæological and Celtic Society. The manuscript, numbered 1106 in Trinity College Catalogue, contains the following

transcripts and translations by Eugene O'Curry :—

1. Life of St. Columba, from the Book of Lis-  
more, and translation.
2. Preface to the Amhra of Columcille, from  
Lebhar na h-Uidhre.
3. Preface to the Altus, from the Lebhar Breac.
4. Story of Columba and his work, from the  
Lebhar Breac.
5. Story of Columba, King Brandubh and the  
devils, from the Book of Lecan.
6. Wandering of Snedgus and MacRiaghla,  
from Yellow Book of Lecan.
7. Preface to the Amhra, from the Y.B.L.
8. Columbcille and the King of Alban's daugh-  
ter, from Y.B.L.
9. Story of Connor Mac Nessa, from Y.B.L.
10. Extract from Life of Diarmid MacFergusa  
Cerrbheoil, from Y.B.L.
11. Death of Aedh mac Ainmire, from Y.B.L.
12. Legend of Inbher Ailbhine, from Book of  
Ballymote.
13. Vision of Adamnan, from Lebhar Breac.
14. St. Ruadhan and King Diarmid.
15. Adamnan and Finnachta, from the manu-  
script of Mr. Mason.

To these transcripts and translations is appended the following note: "All the above were copied and translated by Eugene Curry for Wm. Reeves, and this collection so made is unique." The words "for Wm. Reeves" are omitted in Abbot's catalogue, but will be found in the manuscript. I think that this gives us some idea of the material

which O'Curry in his off time passed on to men like Reeves, and by means of which they gained considerable reputation as Irish scholars and antiquaries. I could add further evidence from the same manuscript and from others but I am sure this will suffice for the present. It was at this time that O'Curry became acquainted with the collection of Irish manuscripts at Brussels. In 1840 there was published *L'Inventaire des manuscrits de l'ancienne bibliothèque royale des ducs de Bourgogne*, and this contained a list of Irish manuscripts formerly belonging to the Franciscans of Louvain and then in the Burgundian Library at Brussels. It was Mr. Laurence Waldron, M.P., of Ballybrack, as O'Curry says, who about the year 1844 brought the collection under the notice of Irish scholars in Dublin. At O'Curry's request he made transcripts and tracings "of great accuracy and of deep interest." In 1846 Mr. Samuel Bindon made a further examination of these manuscripts and compiled a short catalogue, read before the Royal Irish Academy on May 10th, 1847. These accounts were supplemented by those of Todd and Graves who visited Brussels shortly afterwards. Amongst these manuscripts, chiefly hagiographical, was a perfect copy of the *War of the Gael with the Gaill*, and of this manu-

script, lent by the Belgian Government, O'Curry made a transcript for Trinity College Library from which Todd edited his edition for the Rolls Series in 1867. One can discount the croaking pessimism of despondent idlers in our own day when we remember the industry and generous idealism of these Irishmen whose faith in the vitality of the spirit of Irish nationality not even the depressing years of the Great Famine could destroy.

## CHAPTER VIII

### O'CURRY IN LONDON AND OXFORD

IN the month of May, 1849, O'Curry was summoned to London to give evidence before the Public Library Committee of the House of Commons. It is worth while recalling the figure of the simple Celtic scholar who, heedless of the material wealth of the great Saxon city, bent his steps to seek amidst the manuscripts of the British Museum evidences of the spiritual greatness of his race. There is a restrained dignity in his own description of the visit which expresses better than I can the unostentatious enthusiasm of the man. "I determined," he says, "to pay a short visit to



the British Museum which I had never before seen ; and on being properly introduced to Sir Frederick Madden, that learned and polite officer at once gave me the most free access to the Museum collection of Irish Manuscripts. Among the volumes laid before me my attention was at once caught by a thin book of large quarto size in a brass cover, not a shrine, but a mere cover of the ordinary shape and construction. On examing this cover I found it composed of two plates of brass, projecting nearly half an inch over the edges of the leaves at the front and ends and connected at the back by a pair of hinges thus giving the volume perfect freedom of opening on a principle not much put in practice by ordinary bookbinders. The brass was rather clean and had a modern appearance. The plates measured about twelve inches in length, nine in breadth, and three-eighth's in thickness. The front plate had a plain cross etched on it about eight inches long with arms in proportion. I immediately guessed that the book within was not one of any insignificant character, and I hoped indeed that it might be some one of the many ancient works which, I well knew, had been long missing. Full of expectation I opened the volume and threw my eyes rapidly over the first pages, from which,

though much soiled and almost illegible, I discovered at once that I had come upon a *Life of St. Patrick*. Being well acquainted with all Irish copies of the *Life* known to exist here at home, I immediately found this to be one that was strange to me, and it at once occurred to me that it was a copy of the long-lost Tripartite. Under this impression I called for Colgan's *Trias Thaumaturga*, which having got I at once proceeded to a comparison, and although I am but little acquainted with the Latin language, I soon found my expectations realised, for it was unmistakably a fine old copy of the *Tripartite Life of St. Patrick*." During this short visit to England in 1849, in which he and Todd found time to examine the Bodleian collection at Oxford, O'Curry compiled the descriptive Catalogue of the Irish Manuscripts in the British Museum, a volume of 519 folios, and containing a description of 160 manuscripts. It remained the only catalogue of these manuscripts till Standish Hayes O'Grady commenced his magnificent one. Red-tape never strangled anything so rich and rare as O'Grady's splendid but, alas, now uncompleted work.

During these years of almost superhuman labour O'Curry received about the remuneration of a decent artisan. He saw around

him hundreds of nobodies in receipt of rich salaries for doing next to nothing. A £10 note for this transcription and translation, a £5 note for that, added to the meagre and precarious income on which he had to support his young family. As is well known O'Donovan and O'Curry married sisters; and it was felt by their friends that even at the eleventh hour something should be done to free them from wretched monetary anxieties. O'Donovan meditated emigrating to America, when the establishment of the Brehon Law Commission in 1852 helped to retain his services for the home-land. O'Curry had already turned his attention to the great Brehon Law Tracts. As early as 1840 we find him transcribing for Trinity College Library Duaid MacFirbis's *Glossary*, and from 1849 to 1851 he received the sum of £30 from the Royal Irish Academy for transcripts of the *Senchus Mór*. One of the most surprising things about him was the rapidity with which he worked. He and O'Donovan commenced their labours under the direction of the Brehon Law Commissioners in January, 1853, working daily from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at a small salary; yet O'Donovan found time to continue his publications for the Archæological Societies, and O'Curry to make numerous transcriptions and translations illustrating the general

history of Ireland. Though acquainted with a large mass of his unpublished manuscripts, I am unable to give here a complete list of them. It would be out of place in a work like this, but until that list is published any idea of his work I have given is very inadequate. For the projected edition of the Brehon Laws O'Donovan transcribed 2,491 pages and O'Curry 2,906. Of the preliminary translation, O'Donovan's is contained in 12 volumes and O'Curry's in 13. I do not wish to enter in detail into the unhappy controversy over the Brehon Laws—a controversy which embittered the last days of O'Curry and O'Donovan, and created somewhat of an estrangement between them. Anyone would admit that by this time O'Curry and O'Donovan deserved to be left a free hand in the editing of Irish texts. In the Ireland of that day they were without peers. Yet the old-time dodge was again tried of making *them* do the work and letting *others* reap the glory. Those who tried it reckoned without their host in O'Curry. O'Curry was now backed by his own people. His position as professor in the newly-founded Catholic University shielded him from unworthy tricks of quondam friends. The position was simply this. An attempt was made to make O'Curry subordinate to O'Donovan. Dr. Graves gave the puerile

reason that O'Curry did not know Latin, but O'Curry retorted that what was wanted was not a knowledge of Latin but a knowledge of Old Irish which "had baffled the best classical scholars of Trinity College for generations." This move failed, but Graves and his friends were more successful in getting, as regards Irish at least, two absolute ignoramuses named Busteed and Hancock appointed in 1860 over O'Donovan and O'Curry. Their treatment of O'Curry and O'Donovan was that of two pedagogues trying to prevent two small boys from "copying." The whole thing would be laughable were it not so scandalous. Fortunately we have a clear statement of this wretched affair from O'Curry himself printed in the *Journal* of the National Literary Society from a manuscript in the possession of Dr. Sigerson. It is to be regretted that O'Curry lost his temper with his great colleague O'Donovan, but the latter seems to have submitted too tamely to the indignity that was sought to be inflicted on them both, and failed to co-operate with his distinguished brother-in-law. Nor can anyone say that O'Curry had any objection to the appointment of a competent general editor, for, with the insight of genius, he wished to have his brilliant pupil, Whitley Stokes, appointed to the

post or, failing him, his friend John Edward Pigott. Had Stokes been appointed we should have had an edition of the *Brehon Laws* which would have been a standard one for many a day. From a letter written by O'Curry on May 12th, 1862, a few months before his death, to Dr. W. K. Sullivan, he seems to have practically decided to withdraw in disgust from a work hampered by the interference of ignorant busy-bodies: "It would be highly displeasing to me," he writes, "to come into angry contact with Sir Thomas Larcom and Dr. Graves, the ruling spirits of the Commission, and I don't know that it would not be better for me to withdraw altogether from the *Brehon Laws* and turn my now hard-drained energies to something else of a quieter and smoother character."

## CHAPTER IX

### PROFESSOR IN THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

FORTUNATELY for O'Curry there was to be found one who, before these harassing trials came upon him, had recognised his wonderful powers and had determined to give him a position in which he could give free expression to his inmost convictions and full

scope for the publication of the fruits of his untiring years of scholarly research. I know nothing nobler in the history of human effort than the attempt made by the Catholic people of Ireland, crushed and decimated as they were by the Great Famine, to establish a University which would resuscitate the best traditions of Irish scholarship and win a hearing for the claims of Celtic culture. It was in 1851 that public collections were commenced throughout the Irish dioceses for the purpose of establishing this University. In the Autumn of 1854 the University classes were opened. The rector was John Henry Newman, and he at once decided to appoint Eugene O'Curry to the chair of Irish History and Archæology, the first adequate and independent endowment of pure Irish scholarship since the days of the O'Clerys and the MacFirbises. The glowing tribute of O'Curry, in his Introduction to the Lectures, to the hearty sympathy and attentive hearing, as a member of his class, which he received from the late Fellow of Oriel College, Oxford, is well known.

If proof were needed of the ultimate solidarity of the interests of human culture, it is, I think, to be found in the fact that Dr. Samuel Johnson, the greatest man of letters in the England of the

eighteenth century lent his support to the scholarly efforts of Charles O'Connor of Balanagar; and that in the nineteenth century we find the greatest master of English prose, the most cultured Englishman of his day, lending the whole weight of his moral support to the efforts of the simple-minded but knowledge-loving Irishman, in whom he recognised a kindred zeal for the advancement of the domain of human thought. Here was no cheap sneer at the want of a little Latin nor yet a little Greek! What a contrast to the Busteeds, the Hancocks, *et hoc genus omne*. In the faculty of Philosophy and Letters O'Curry had associated with him distinguished colleagues such as Denis Florence MacCarthy, T. W. Allies, Aubrey de Vere, John O'Hagan, Peter le Page Renouf, and my own former Professor of English Literature, Thomas Arnold, whose brother Matthew expressed his appreciation of the new movement in his charming *Essay on Celtic Literature*. In the all too short-lived *Atlantis* appeared brilliant papers from these distinguished men, including one from Dr. Sigerson, who early displayed his rare union of scientific knowledge and literary power. In the *Atlantis*, whilst O'Curry was publishing his texts and translations of the *Three Sorrows of Story-telling*, Le Page



Renouf was contributing those famous papers which were to include his "noteworthy defence of Egyptological science against the attacks of Sir George Cornwall Lewis, and which finally disposed of all objections to Young and Champollion's method of deciphering the hieroglyphs." \*

During his last years the demand on O'Curry's time and energies was enormous. From 1852 till his death he was engaged on the work of the *Brehon Laws*, spending the summer of 1855 with O'Donovan in the British Museum and the Bodleian at Oxford. In the same year he published

\* It is not without significance that in our newly-founded National University there has been found a place for one who is likely, if we are to accept the testimony of men like Professor Sachau of the University of Berlin, to maintain the reputation of our native University in the domain of Egyptological science. I refer to Father Boylan, Professor of Scripture in Maynooth and of Eastern Languages in University College, Dublin. In addition one of the chief features in the constitution of the new National University is a well-endowed Faculty of Celtic Studies, which, we trust, will continue the patriotic and industrious traditions of the old Faculty of the Catholic University. Finally, a notable link between the two Universities is found in the fact that His Grace the Most Rev. Dr. Walsh, Archbishop of Dublin, the real founder of the National University and its first Chancellor, was himself a pupil of the old Catholic University. I may also add that during the existence of the Royal University the succession in Celtic Studies was continued in University College, Dublin, by Prof. O'Looney, and by my own master in *rebus Celticis*, Rev. Edmund Hogan, S.J., LL.D.

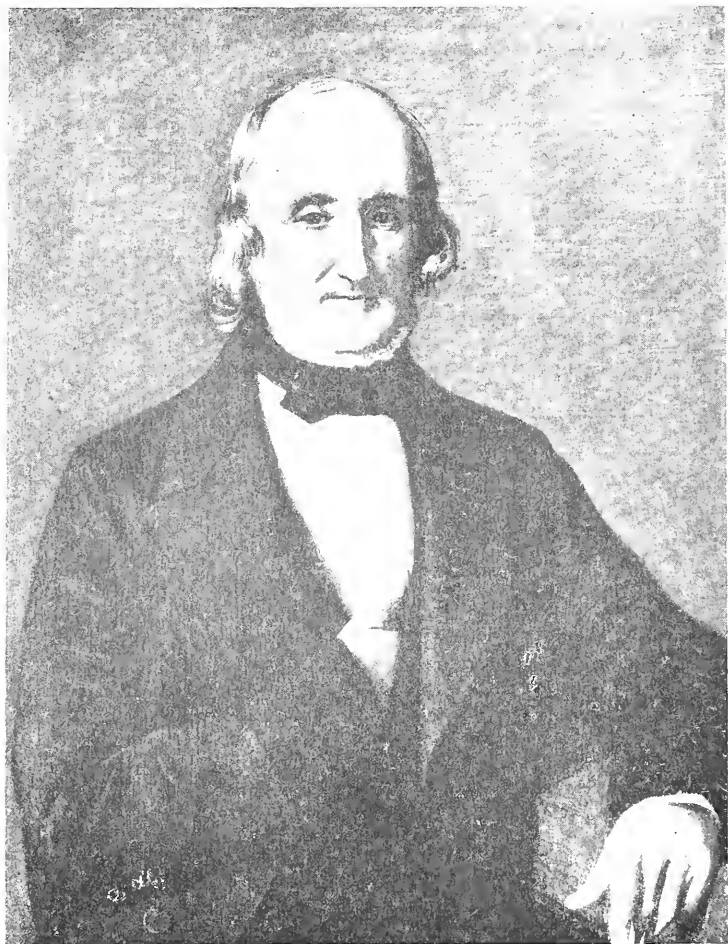
for the Celtic Society his editions of the *Battle of Magh Leana* and the *Tochmarc Momera*. Early in his career he had worked at the now well-known Irish Glossaries and had kept in view the publication of a great Dictionary of the Irish Language. In 1852 a Committee was formed to help in the publication of a Dictionary; O'Curry collected the material, but before his death sufficient funds were not forthcoming to warrant them in going to press. Meanwhile he found time to attend the meetings of an Association for the Preservation and Cultivation of Irish Music, John Edward Pigott and Dr. Robert Lyons acting as secretaries. In 1857 we find him touring with Dr. Stokes, Dr. Petrie, Whitley Stokes, Samuel Ferguson, Margaret Stokes, John O'Donovan, Martin Haverty, Sir William Wilde, and others, collecting old traditional airs and songs, examining antiquarian remains, and making, as Martin Haverty puts it, "a most beautiful speech in Irish to the people of Aran assembled in one of the old Firbolg forts." During the years 1855-1856 O'Curry delivered in the Catholic University his famous *Lectures on the Manuscript Materials of Early Irish History*; and from 1857 to July, 1862, he delivered his course of *Lectures on the Manners and Customs of the Ancient Irish*. The first was published

in 1861, the second in 1873, after his death, with an Introduction by his friend W. K. Sullivan. Needless to say they received the highest praise from everyone interested in Celtic studies in that day. They definitely revealed to the world the wealth of Irish manuscript literature. Accessible as they are in printed form, owing to the munificence of the Catholic University authorities, I am dispensed from any detailed reference to them. Suffice it to say that they are in reality printed guides to the enormous mass of his unprinted transcripts and translations. They have been frequently criticised for not being what they never professed to be. O'Curry was not a philologist in the modern sense of the word. Further, the plan of his work put it out of his power to sift to their origins the thousand and one traditions that jostle one another in his pages. It would take a hundred scholars to adequately deal with the problems that are suggested by the material he unearthed. His real title to fame is that he did unearth this material; that he gave us the initial key to the solution of these problems by his masterly analysis of the contents of the great National Manuscripts, and that he set an example to his countrymen of tireless labour and of unbending faith in the dignity of Ireland's Past. Nor must

it be forgotten that with O'Donovan he was the centre of an enthusiastic band of fellow-workers who but for him would have been powerless to penetrate the secrets sealed till then in the ancient language of Ireland.

Amidst the trials of his later years he had the sympathy of staunch friends. He was a frequent and honoured guest at the house of Cardinal Cullen, whose great wisdom and practical advice were ever at his service; whilst he won the affectionate esteem of Cardinal Moran, then Dr. Moran, who cherished his memory to the end. From the Oratory in Birmingham, John Henry Newman wrote him kindest words of encouragement and sympathy; in the preparation of his printed Lectures John Edward Pigott lent him an unostentatious aid which was little less than filial; whilst the letters of Whitley Stokes to his dear master or "Aite," as he reverently calls him, wound up with the ever-recurring "Your affectionate dálta" (or foster-son). The interest which he took in the future editor of the *Féilire* may be estimated from the mere fact that between January 5th and July 5th of the year 1859, Stokes addressed to him twenty-six letters from Lincoln's Inn, full of queries and difficulties and of thanks for answers and solutions generously given. The debt of Stokes to O'Curry is manifestly





**GEORGE PETRIE.**

*(From an Oil Painting in possession of the Royal Irish Academy.)*

great indeed. But O'Curry's deepest consolation in the closing months of his life must have been that he had drained in the cause of Ireland to its very dregs all the power of the great intelligence and of the powerful physical frame inherited from his father Eoghan Mór. He delivered his last lecture in July, 1862. On the 20th of the same month he took part in the procession at the laying of the foundation stone of the new Catholic University of Ireland on a spot consecrated by the labours of St. Columba and redolent of the fame of the hero of Clontarf. In the vast assembly of that day, composed of thirty-two Bishops, and, it is said, two hundred thousand spectators, one may single out the simple yet majestic figure of the great scholar who, more than any other, represented the undying spirit of his race. There was something prophetic in this his last public appearance. The closing days of his life were spent in the quiet of his home amidst his beloved manuscripts. On the evening of Wednesday, July 30th, 1862, he complained of a pain about the region of his heart and at twenty minutes past four it had ceased to beat for ever. Ireland has reason to be proud of Eugene O'Curry. Fifty years have passed away since he was laid in an Irish grave. No stately monument marks

the spot where he lies at rest ; but his name is written in the hearts and memories of those who love Ireland. He came to us from the Western Sea where the horses of Mananan beat with angry hoof on the rock-bound coast of Clare. He came to us from the dying years of a century rich in suffering and in achievement. He came to us as a leader in the Renaissance of Celtic Studies, a star-soul in the East to guide us to the magic cradle of the Celtic West, a leader true to his mission to the end ; and we, his pupils, are proud of him—proud of his accomplishment, more proud of his endeavour, for his aim is a greater inspiration to us than the calculating scholarship of lesser men, and to-day we may leave him at rest secure on the mountain-top of his Fame :—

“ Here—here’s his place where meteors  
shoot,

Clouds form,  
Lightnings are loosened,  
Stars come and go ! let joy break

With the storm.  
Peace let the dew send !  
Lofty designs must close in like effects :

Loftily lying,  
Leave him—still loftier than the world  
suspects

Living and dying.”



## CHAPTER X.

### GEORGE PETRIE, THE ARTIST

GEORGE PETRIE was born in Dublin in 1789. His paternal grandfather had come from Aberdeen, and his mother was the daughter of Sacheverell Simpson, of Edinburgh. Notwithstanding his Scotch origin, Petrie was, in sympathy and tastes, an Irishman and a Dublin man to the core. Whether it be due to the complexity of its history or of its race-elements, our Irish capital has a charm for those who have been born in it, or have come to live in it, which is all its own. Danish and Norman and English elements have united to give it a temper which refuses to be insular, and the Irish element insures its fundamental patriotism. In its Georgian houses rebels have been born and bred, and the home of its National Parliament is a work of classical beauty. It is the open door to the Continent and to England, and in the eighteenth century, it seemed as if English and Continental influences dominated its intellectual life. It seemed to have forgotten the remains of that great Celtic civilisation whose monuments and whose language kept their quiet secrets amidst the mountains and grass-lands of the West.

The education which Petrie received at Whyte's famous school in Grafton Street would, at first blush, appear to be a poor preparation for the work of his life ; yet such is the fructifying power of real culture that it was, as far as one can judge, his love of an English poet, Wordsworth, that quickened in him a sensibility for the study of man and of nature. From his father, an antiquary and a portrait painter, he inherited his love for antiquarian study and that artistic power which he used with such effect in his charming sketches of Irish antiquarian scenes ; but from Wordsworth he derived that gentle sympathy with the human association of his subjects which lends to his works a distinctive quality. In all Petrie's sketches one perceives the rare union of the artist, the antiquary, and the poet.

It was fortunate for us that a mind so firmly imbued with the spaciousness of fundamental artistic conceptions should have found its local application in Ireland. As a boy of nineteen years Petrie visited Wicklow, and the Diary which he wrote when on tour reveals how wide, from the beginning, were his sympathies—whether with music, antiquities, or scenery. In 1813 he visited London and, later, Wales ; but in all his travels his mind “ fondly

turned to home"; and during these early years his artistic studies in Irish scenery and antiquities lent to otherwise ordinary guide books\* a rare distinction. Petrie's artistic work is characterised by delicacy of detail, truthfulness of drawing, and a refined sensibility; the want of depth of tone which is felt in his work is due in him not to any innate inability to value it, but rather to that analytic tendency of his mind which was to display its power in the analysis of Irish ornament and in the discovery of the origin of Irish antiquarian remains. In other words, he clearly shaped his artistic work to meet the essential requirements of antiquarian illustration.† In addition, his sense of responsibility and of truthfulness was too great to allow him to attempt to transfer to book illustrations the elusive colouring of Irish landscape or Irish skies. Most people who visit antiquarian remains are content with a general and cursory examination; but Petrie, through his artistic work, acquired an intimate knowledge of them which lent to

\* Cromwell's *Excursions in Ireland*; Brewer's *Beauties of Ireland*; Fisher's *Historical Guide to Ancient and Modern Dublin*; Wright's *Tours in Killarney, Wicklow, and Antrim*.

† See *The Ecclesiastical Architecture of Ireland*, etc., by G. Petrie. Dublin: Hodges & Smith, 1845. Preface, pp. ix, x.

his opinions a singular scientific value. Perhaps one of the most important factors in determining once for all his antiquarian bent was his tour to the West and to the Aran Islands in 1820-1821. It was on this tour that he studied for the first time the great group of ecclesiastical remains at Clonmacnoise,\* which his pencil and his pen were to illustrate so profusely. The round towers and the exquisitely carved Celtic crosses awakened in him an affectionate interest which only ceased with death.

From the Shannon Petrie proceeded to Aran—Aran of the Saints—where he found an inexhaustible field of investigation. But as he embodied his more mature observations on Clonmacnoise and on Aran in later volumes, we may be permitted to refer the reader to his description, in his *Diary of this tour*, of the central figure in the Aran Islands of that day—the description of the old parish priest, Father Frank O’Flaherty. Petrie, though a Protestant, was a man of a most tolerant mind, and Catholics may well be proud of his glowing tribute† to the simple virtues of those cultured priests of long ago, who min-

\* See the excellent sketch of Clonmacnoise by Prof. R. A. Macalister, Catholic Truth Society of Ireland.

† See Stokes’ *Life of Petrie*, pp. 59-64.

istered with disinterested zeal to the spiritual and temporal welfare of their poor but devoted flocks : " Let imagination fancy," he says, " the qualities that should adorn the priest, and the ideal attributes will not be much unlike those that really belong to Father Francis O'Flaherty." We are unable to give at length Petrie's splendid description of Father Frank, but shall merely say that nothing finer has been written since Chaucer drew his immortal portrait of a perfect priest.

On his return to Dublin with a portfolio of sketches and a memory stored with vivid recollections of the historic landscapes of the West, Petrie felt that the time had come for the foundation of an institution devoted to the forwarding of Irish Art. Already in the *Dublin Examiner* of May, 1816, he had pleaded for the establishment of a School of Irish Art, and he criticised the system of training in the schools of the Dublin Society. With the Royal Hibernian Academy, whose first exhibition of pictures took place in 1826, he was intimately associated, and it was in the year 1830 that he was elected its librarian. Some of his most notable pictures\* were exhibited on its

\* In 1829—"The Round Tower of Kilbannon" (Co. Galway); "Dún Aengus in Aranmore"; "The Knight and the Lady" (Scene, Comeen Dubh, Co. Kerry);

walls, and their intensely Irish character did much to prepare the way for the growth of that Celtic movement of which he and O'Curry and O'Donovan were the pioneers.

With the closing of those early years Petrie, from the purely artistic, was to pass into larger fields. As may be seen from his charming description of Father Frank O'Flaherty, he wielded the pen as gracefully as the pencil or the brush. His style has an old-time simplicity and delicacy which will appeal to those whose tastes are not chained to what is merely modern. By means of it he was enabled to popularise his learned exposition of his scientific methods and discoveries, and from an early date his pen, as well as his pencil, travelled in company with his thought. His desire was to win over Irishmen of all classes to a proud interest in the historic past of their country. To this end he and the Rev. Cæsar Otway founded the *Dublin Penny Journal* in 1832, and in it, and later in the *Irish Penny Journal*, he and O'Donovan placed within the reach of the ordinary reader something like a true account of

"The Abbey, Inis na m-beó, Co. Tipperary." In 1831—  
"Llanberis Lake"; "The Eagle's Nest, Killarney";  
"The Glen of the Horse, Killarney"; "Gougane Barra";  
"The Home of the Heron, Lough Atree, Connemara";  
"Stone Circles, Caah Hill, Dungiven," etc.

the historic and the antiquarian past of Ireland.\*

Since Petrie's time we are, of course, in a position to establish with overwhelming evidence opinions which he put forward with reservation. Comparative Archæology has revolutionised our views and made the old religious and race prejudices which cut across the path of scientific inquiry more or less ridiculous. Amongst first-hand investigators a belated specimen of that religious or race-prejudiced type may be found, but in really scientific circles the species tends more and more to become extinct. But what we must consider is the state of knowledge which Petrie found around him, and the state in which he left it. It seems to us ridiculous to mind the biassed opinions of an historian like Pinkerton, who spoke of "the wild Irish as being some of the veriest savages on the globe"; but only those who have studied the mentality of the ascendancy class in the Ireland of his day will know how truly this reflected its deep-seated prejudices. Petrie undertook to show that Ireland *could* claim her share in the progress of European culture. To do so he per-

\* To the *Irish Penny Journal* O'Curry, Wills, Anster, Ferguson, Mangan, Aubrey de Vere and Carleton contributed.

ceived clearly that the only way to dispel the clouds of ignorance which political and religious prejudice had created was to gather together, preserve, and elucidate every monument that bore witness to the past culture of the Irish people. Three classes of material especially lay to hand—manuscript literature, artistic work in stone or metal, and Irish music. The foundation in Dublin of the Royal Irish Academy in 1795 had already provided a home for the housing of such materials. Up to 1830 it possessed a few but important manuscripts—the *Book of Lecan*, the *Book of Ballymote*, and the *Leabhar Breac*; to-day, thanks to the efforts of Petrie, O'Curry, O'Donovan, Todd, Graves, Gilbert, Reeves, and others, it possesses about 2,000 manuscripts. In 1827 Petrie became a member of the Academy, and in 1829 he was elected a member of the Council. He at once set himself to the work of collecting and purchasing all the manuscripts available. In 1831 the manuscripts of Mr. Austin Cooper, which included the original of the *Annals of the Four Masters*, were secured, and this purchase was followed by that of the great collection of Messrs. Hodges and Smith and the large collection of Sir William Betham. To Petrie the language of these great manuscripts was a closed book,



and it must have been the desire of his heart that some one should be found who would open to him their secrets. When, therefore, on the evening of the 7th January, 1832, a young man, named John O'Donovan, presented himself at Great Charles Street with a letter of introduction from Hardiman, Petrie must have felt that at last the man and the hour had come. Three years later Eugene O'Curry was discovered, and came to join O'Donovan and Petrie on the staff of the Ordnance Survey ; and so was established that unique combination which was to place, once and for all, Irish linguistic and antiquarian studies on a firm and scientific basis.

## CHAPTER XI

### PIONEER OF IRISH ARCHÆOLOGY

WHEN Petrie became a member of the Royal Irish Academy in 1827 he found there the nucleus of a museum of antiquities in a small collection of stone weapons and implements presented by the King of Denmark.\* Petrie found them scattered

\* These constituted almost exclusively the beginnings of our splendid National Museum. The present writer has been acquainted since childhood with that

on the floor of an upper room of the Academy House. He set himself to arrange these antiquities and to add to them. In this work he was warmly seconded by Professor MacCullagh. In 1837 the Underwood Collection was purchased. In 1839 the purchase for one hundred pounds of the famous Cross of Cong was effected through Mr. George Smith for Professor MacCullagh; and the great cross, together with the magnificent gold torques found at Tara, was presented by Petrie, on 24th June, 1839, to the Academy. Shortly afterwards there was added to the Museum the collection of Dr. Dawson, Dean of St. Patrick's (commenced in 1832), and on this followed the acquisition of the *Domnach Airgid* and of the collection of antiquities gathered by the Shannon Commissioners and the Board of Works. Since Petrie's time, through private bequests, private purchase, and purchase under the

Museum. Before its transference to Kildare Street it was housed in a room known as the "Long Room," in the "Gold Room" (now the Manuscript Room), and in the basement (or "crypt" as it was called) of the R. I. Academy House, 19 Dawson Street, Dublin. After Petrie's time it was in charge of the Librarian, Mr. Edward Clibborn; later, on the appointment of Mr. J. J. MacSweeney, in 1869, as Librarian, a Curator of the Museum, Major Robert MacEniry, and a Clerk of Council, Mr. Robert Macalister, LL.D., were appointed. The present Curator (in Kildare Street) is Mr. George Coffey.

law of Treasure-trove, the Academy's Museum of Celtic Antiquities has become the finest and richest of its class in the world.

On each antiquity acquired by the Academy it was Petrie's custom to read a paper, and these papers,\* contributed throughout his lifetime to its *Proceedings* and *Transactions*, form no small part of his scientific work. Just as O'Donovan is popularly known as the editor and translator of the *Annals of the Four Masters*, and O'Curry as the author of *Lectures on the Manuscript Materials of Early Irish History*, Petrie is popularly known as a writer on the Round Towers of Ireland. But the work on the Round Towers is only a chapter in his great work on Ecclesiastical Architecture, and this latter is but a fraction of the work of his lifetime.

As the Academy collection grew under his hands, Petrie undertook to write a descriptive catalogue of it. The project was thwarted through the impatience of the Council, who did not realise its difficulty. Petrie's conception of what such a catalogue should be is admirably summed up in a fragment† which was to form a portion of the introduction to the catalogue of his own private museum: "The arrangement

\* See Stokes' *Life of Petrie*, pp. 438, 439.

† Ibid. pp. 82-84.

and descriptive catalogue of such a collection should be made with the greatest possible attention to the principle of chronological succession." He further states that in this he is following the example of his friends, Dr. Thomsen and Dr. Worsaae. Petrie's friends, the Scandinavian antiquaries, Thomsen and Worsaae, were the founders of scientific archæology. To them is due the classification of the protohistoric period into Stone, Bronze, and Iron Ages; and Ireland, thanks to Petrie, was from the beginning to benefit by a knowledge of this fundamental classification. Petrie was, therefore, a pioneer. Since his time archæological investigation, owing to the fruitful use of the comparative method, has developed enormously, and at the present time there is scarcely a portion of the globe which has not attracted the attention of some society or some individual worker. But the essential principles of the science of archæology inaugurated by Thomsen and Worsaae in Scandinavia, and propagated in Ireland by their friend Petrie, still hold the field.

In addition to antiquarian objects which can conveniently be arranged and preserved in a museum, there is also that very large class of antiquarian remains which of necessity must remain *in situ*. We can transfer

the Tara brooch, the Ardagh chalice, or the cross of Cong to a glass case in our Museum at Dublin, but it would be a difficult feat to do the same for Dún Aengus, the Grianán of Aileach, or the Hill of Tara! From his earliest years Petrie had taken an affectionate and scientific interest in this latter class of monuments. To register them, to sketch them, to describe them, and to preserve them were among the chief aims of his life.

The fulfilment of these aims seemed secured by the establishment of the Antiquarian Department of the Ordnance Survey. In 1783 a Trigonometrical Survey of Great Britain had been commenced, and in 1824 the House of Commons recommended a survey and valuation of Ireland. In addition to mapping, a Geological Survey was also recommended.

On the appointment, in 1826, of Captain (later Major-General Sir Thomas) Larcom, R.E., as Director of the Irish Survey, he decided to extend the scope of the work so as to include topography, history, antiquities, natural products, economic state, and social conditions. The department of Topography, History, and Antiquities was entrusted to Petrie, and he quickly gathered round him that small but distinguished

band\* of nation-builders with two others of whom—O'Curry and O'Donovan—the present little book deals.

In the *Dublin Penny Journal* (1832-1833) Petrie and O'Donovan contributed article after article in the hope of quickening the public interest in the history and antiquities of Ireland. Those who love knowledge for its own sake have ever treasured and will treasure these pages, so enhanced by the delicate woodcut illustrations of Petrie. But whilst trying to gain the ear of the general public Petrie was not unmindful of the claims of thoroughgoing scientific research. From 1833 to 1837 he wrote his *Essay on the Round Towers* (1833), his *Essay on the Military Architecture of Ireland* (1834, unpublished and unrevised), and his *Essay on the History and Antiquities of Tara Hill* (1837). The *Essay on the Round Towers* gained the Gold Medal and a prize of £50 from the Royal Irish Academy; but as it was later included in an enlarged form in his book on the *Ecclesiastical Architecture of Ireland* (1845), we may leave it over for the present. The *Essay on the Military Architecture of Ireland* was never revised, and is still in manuscript in the Royal Irish Academy. We may, therefore, pass to his *Essay on*

\* See Stokes' *Life of Petrie*, p. 89.

Tara, which offers an excellent example of the result of the collaboration between Petrie, O'Donovan, and O'Curry.

In selecting Tara as a subject for treatment Petrie was following a line which would bring his work quickly under notice. MacPherson and Tom Moore had cast a romantic glamour over Tara ; and if there was any feature in Celtic antiquity that the general public of the day might be said to be familiar with, it was Tara. Yet Tara is comparatively recent compared with Cruachan of Connaught and Emain Macha of Ulster, round which the Cuchulainn Saga centres. As a place of residence or of sepulture it is probably very old, but as a centre of power it rises into prominence in the Christian era.

Only those who have read the lucubrations of Vallancey and Betham will have any idea of the chaos of guess-work that Petrie found himself confronted with. When Petrie came on the scene Sir William Betham dominated the antiquarian section of the Royal Irish Academy, and when the Academy was slowly won round to adopt Petrie's views and bestowed on him its Gold Medal, Sir William withdrew in anger from its Council as a protest against their action. Bad philology, or rather guess-work etymology, was one of the main

causes of Sir William Betham's far-fetched views. His *a priori* method led him to support his theories on what he called the "affinity of the Phœnician, Etruscan and Celtic languages" by etymologies which it is difficult for us to believe could have ever found their way into the Transactions or Proceedings of any learned society. The reader will find the neatest and most striking example of the contrast between the old and the new school in the papers read by Betham and Petrie respectively at a meeting\* of the Academy, on April 24th, 1837. Betham's paper is a tissue of guess-work, of which the following gives a fair sample: "Accordingly," he says, "we find the whole of Etruria replete with names of Pelasgic or Phœnician origin, thus:

"*Tyrsenus*—The old land—*τιν̄ γεγονοῑ*.

"*Ciris*—The swift stream—*σῑν̄β̄ σῑρ̄ζε*," and so on.

What Petrie thought as he listened to this fanciful outburst we may imagine. When Betham had finished, Petrie proceeded, "by permission of Colonel Colby, to read the first part of a paper *On the Antiquities of Tara Hill*, being a portion of the memoir to illustrate the Ordnance Map

\* *Proceedings*, R.I.A., 1837, pp. 63-70.



of Meath.”\* In the printed copy of 1839, which I have before me,† there are 208 pages. Half the work (up to page 104) is devoted to an account of the historical events and persons associated with Tara, the remaining half deals with the antiquarian remains on the Hill itself. Text after text, with translation into English, is given with substantial accuracy by O'Donovan, illustrating the traditional history of the hill-residence, from its first reputed founder Slainge, the first monarch of the Firbolg, down to its abandonment in A.D. 563, in the reign of King Dermot. Leaving aside all fanciful etymologies and theories, Petrie and O'Donovan place before the reader in chronological order a series of texts with a suggestive commentary which, for the first time, clears the way to anything like a scientific solution of the problems associated with the history of Tara. Their attitude towards this traditional material is sufficiently expressed in the following passage:—

“On the other hand, however, it would be equally premature to reject these traditions as wholly fabulous, as to receive

\* *Proceedings*, R.I.A., 1837, p. 68.

† Presented by Petrie to the Rev. Dr. Russell, Vice-President of Maynooth College, with the author's respectful regards.

them as real history, until the whole body of evidence contained in the Irish MSS. shall be subjected to critical examination, by being laid before the public with literal translations.”\*

From King Slainge Petrie passes to the reign of King Cimbaoth, beginning in 305 B.C. As is well known, this date was considered as the earliest certain date in Irish history. Following on that of *Cimbaoth*, the reigns of *Ollamh Fodhla*, *Tuathal Techtmhar* and *Cormac Mac Airt* (A.D. 218) are dealt with. In connexion with Cormac, the authorship of the *Teagasc Riogh*, the *Psalter of Tara*, and Cormac's claim to be the founder of the ancient Irish code of laws are discussed.

A short notice is then given of the kings intermediate between Cormac Mac Airt and King Laoghair, in whose reign St. Patrick came to Ireland (A.D. 432). The preaching of the Faith by St. Patrick at Tara gives Petrie an opportunity of discussing at length† the life of the saint. Amongst the documents published for the first time in this connexion is the Irish text of the famous Hymn of St. Patrick. Colgan had published a Latin translation of it, but the Irish text is given by

\* Petrie, *Essay on Tara*, p. 5. † Ibid. pp. 28-94.

O'Donovan for the first time in Petrie's work. The Latin translation gives substantially the meaning of the text, but the translation of the opening word *Atomriug*, by "At Tara," is erroneous, and destroys much of its value as bearing internal evidence of its composition at Tara. *Atomriug* is in reality a verb with infixed pronoun meaning "I invoke."

Petrie then deals with the compilation of the *Senchus Mór* and St. Patrick's part in it, and with the well-known Feis or Meeting at Tara and its identity with the Druidical festival of Beltiné. Finally, he discusses Dr. Lanigan's theories about Sen-Patrick and the Roman Mission of St. Patrick. From the *Book of Lecan*, the *Confessio*, the *Leabhar Breac*, the *Liber Hymnorum*, the *Book of Armagh* (the *Tripartite Life*), the *Féilire of Aengus*, the *Irish Annals*, and Colgan, passages are quoted to prove the historical reality of Patrick and his mission.

The result of Petrie's arguments on the question of the Roman mission of St. Patrick is admirably summed up by his biographer, Dr. William Stokes:—

"But this much may be said, as opposed to some modern views, that however the early Church of Ireland came to differ in matters of discipline from that of Rome—

whatever irregularities may occasionally have occurred—it was an offshoot from the parent Catholic Church of Rome, similar in piety, devotion, and in doctrine.”\*

\* Stokes, *Life of Petrie*, p. 116. Dr. William Stokes and Professor J. B. Bury, both Protestants, reviewing the evidence at different periods and from different standpoints, have come to practically the same conclusion. Dr. William Stokes was the father of the late Whitley Stokes, the intimate friend and former pupil of O’Curry, and of the late Margaret Stokes, the well-known writer on Irish antiquities. Like his father, Whitley Stokes, writing to O’Curry, expressed his dissent from those opposed to the Roman mission of St. Patrick. On the other hand, Dr. Todd was a strong upholder of the anti-Roman claims; and it is a tribute to the broad-minded tolerance of O’Curry and O’Donovan, that their thorough disagreement with him on this subject did not prevent them appreciating his services in neutral fields. It is not, perhaps, generally known that Father W. G. Todd, Dr. Todd’s brother, was a convert to the Catholic faith and corresponded with Eugene O’Curry on Irish matters. He worked and lived on the English Mission for some time at Chiselhurst, Kent. We may be permitted to say here that the fundamental error of the anti-Roman school of writers has been to adduce “particularism” in different branches of the Church as evidence of separate origin. Liturgical and disciplinary differences were and have been eagerly seized upon as evidence of independent origin, and hence the extraordinary prominence given to the Easter question and the question of the Celtic Tonsure as matter for controversy.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE ESSAY ON TARA

IN dealing with the historical associations of the Hill, Petrie relied chiefly upon O'Donovan. Had not O'Donovan opened up to him by text and translation the secrets of the manuscript literature, Petrie could have done little or nothing. In the second part of his work he was, however, to take the initiative. Petrie's powers lay, as we have already said, in the department of monumental antiquities, and in describing the famous remains on the Hill of Tara he found himself quite at home. Yet even here O'Donovan is ever by his side. Together they examined every vestige of the former greatness of Tara. Their plan was simplicity itself. In the first place, an accurate map\* was drawn up, without reference to the manuscript literature. On it the remains then actually existing were marked down. When this had been done all the documents that threw light on the names and history of the existing remains were collected and translated by O'Donovan. Amongst these the chief were the *Dinn-*

\* Page 129, Plate 6, *Trans.*, R.I.A., Vol. XVIII, and facing p. 128 in *ed.* 1839, Dublin.

*seanchus*, a poetic and prose account of the origin of Irish place-names, and Cuan O'Lochain's poem, Τεμαίη τοcca na tuλac, "Tara, first of Hills."

Petrie took as his starting point the identification of the well *Neamhnach*, which the prose *Dinnseanchus* described as lying to the north-east, and as supplying a stream on which the first mill in Ireland was erected. This was at once identified, "as it is the source of a stream which has turned a mill on the site of the ancient one to the present day."\* Following on this came the identification of Ρac na Ριg or *Rath of the Kings*, and Ρac λacgαιpe or the *Rath of Laoghaire*, and, within the *Rath of the Kings*, the smaller monuments:—Τεac Κορμαic or *House of Cormac*, *Teamur*,† the *Forradh*, Ουμα na ηgιall or *Mound of the Hostages*, Ουμα na βο or the *Mound of Glas Teamhrach*, and the *Lia Fail*; then Ρac na Seanaio or *Rath of Synods*; the *Cross of Adamnan*; *Teach Miodchuarta* or *Banqueting House*; the *Sheskin* or *Marsh of Tara* [Τοβαη Finn or *Well of Finn* in the Marsh]; Ρac gραιne or *Rath of Graine*; *Fothath Rath Graine*; the *Rath and the Leacht of Caelchu*, and the well "Laegh."‡

\* Petrie, *Essay on Tara*, p. 126. † Only site known.

‡ Site marked by marsh-soil.

All these monuments exist to the present day, with the exception of *Teamur* and the well, “*Laegh*,” the sites of which are well marked and known. Having drawn a map of the Hill with the existing remains marked on it, Petrie and O’Donovan proceeded to draw a second map,\* on which not only the existing remains were marked, but also the *sites* of all those monuments or features of which mention was made in Irish literature.

The monuments or features whose sites were identified or approximately identified were: the well *Caprach-Cormaic*, *Cuétair Cormaic* or *Cormac’s Kitchen*, *Cnoc bó* or the *Hill of the Cow*, *Leáct Con* and *Leáct Ceten* or the *Grave of Cu* and the *Grave of Cethen*, *Leáct Máine* or *Grave of Maine*, *Leáct Mata Mórsglonnaiḡ* or the *Grave of Mata of the Great Deeds*, *Dúma Adamnain* or *Mound of Adamnan*, the *Seat of Adamnan* and the *House of Benen*,† the three stones marking the grave of *Mael, Blocc*, and *Bluicni*,‡ the grave of the Dwarf (to the E. of *Mael, Blocc*, and *Bluicni*), the mounds

\* Petrie’s *Tara*, ed. 1839, Dublin, facing p. 152, plate 7; and *Trans. R.I.A.* Vol. XVIII. p. 152.

† Near these, in a mound or bank] near the church, were found the two gold torques now in the R.I.A. Museum, Kildare Street.

‡ Situated within churchyard, but not marked on the map.

called *Dall* and *Dorcha*, Μυρνα ὁ-τρὶς ὕCoγυρ or *Wall of the Three Conspiracies*, Ἱα να ἔβριαν or *Stone of the Heroes*, Οὐμὰ να m-ban-amyρ or *Mound of the Women-soldiers*, the two *Claenfearts* or *Declivities*, Φαν να ὕCαριβαο or *Slope of the Chariots*, the *Cross of Fergus*, the *Cairn of the Leinster Youths* and the *Cairn of the Hy-Niall Youths* (Cairn macraíoe Ἱαιγεν and Cairn macraíoe Ἰα Neill), Οειριολ Τεαμπαε, Ραε Ḳolmain mic Ḳaelcon or *Rath of Colman son of Caelchu*, Οὐμὰ an Ἰυεουinn or *Mound of Luchdonn*, the wells *Adhlaic* and *Diadhlaic*, the sites of which are clearly marked, Τριευμὰ or *Triple Mound of Nesi*, Ραε Ḳoncoβαιρ mic Neiri or *Rath of Connor MacNessa*, Ceann aγυρ Meoi Ḳoncuλainn or the *Head and Neck of Cuchulann*, Ραε aγυρ Sciaε Ḳoncuλainn or *Rath and Shield of Cuchulann*, Ἰεαετ Μαιλ aγυρ Miona or *Grave of Mal and Miodna*. The last features, the identification of which is dealt with by Petrie, are the five roads from Tara, or, as the *Book of Lecan*\* names them, the "five chief roads of Ireland: the Slighe Dala and Slighe Asail and Slighe Midluachra and Slighe Cualann and Slighe Mór."

Petrie concludes his essay with a de-

\* *Book of Lecan*, fol. 239, b., col. 1: "Cóic primróit Erenn, .i. Sligi Dala, agus Sligi Asail agus Sligi Midluachra agus Sligi Chualann, Sligi Mór."



scription of two raths in the neighbourhood of Tara: *Rath Meavba* or *Rath of Maeve*, about a mile to the south-east of the Hill; and *Rath Miles*, about a mile to the north.

This mere catalogue of names gives the reader some idea of the wealth of life that circled round the famous hill that commands the rich grass-lands of Meath; but he must go to the pages of Petrie if he wishes to learn something of the wealth of legend and historical tradition with which our manuscript literature abounds in regard to Tara. Yet what Petrie and O'Donovan have garnered represents but a portion of the otherwise ungleaned material.

The Essay on Tara established Petrie's reputation, and for this reason we have given at some length a detailed account of it. In the praise which Petrie won, O'Donovan deserves a large share, for in every page his hand is seen. Meanwhile, Petrie, O'Donovan and O'Curry were carrying on the work of the Ordnance Survey. This work entailed enormous labour, and to anyone who knows what original work in any field is it is amusing to find Sir William Betham charging Petrie with dilatoriness.

Throughout his lifetime he was ever inquiring from O'Donovan or O'Curry about some antiquarian object. We possess

hundreds of his letters, full of terse reference or searching questions. He travelled north, south, east, and west, and pen and pencil were continuously occupied. Of his numerous letters a number, no doubt, have been lost, a small number have been published by Stokes, the rest are in the Library at Maynooth and in the Ordnance Survey volumes in the Royal Irish Academy. In the Academy are also some bound volumes of his unpublished sketches. It is to be hoped that at a near date a fitting monument may be erected to him by the printing of his still unpublished work.

Nothing could exceed the friendly spirit which existed between Petrie and his fellow-workers. In their letters to one another there breathes a sense of fellowship and of disinterested love of their work which fills the reader with whole-hearted admiration. As an example of Petrie's correspondence I may cite a short letter written by him to Captain Larcom, the head of the Ordnance Survey :—

“ GALWAY, 20th August, 1839.

“ MY DEAR LARCOM,—I arrived here on Monday night, and would have written to you yesterday but that I thought it better to wait till I had seen O'Donovan. I had

Wakeman to dine with me at the hotel, and I afterwards went to Hardiman's and spent the evening there. Upon the whole I have a good account to give of the pair. They work incessantly, and you will have in a few days the result—a dissertation on the antiquities and history of the Aran Isles—of singular interest and value. O'Donovan has a little room to himself in Hardiman's, filled with historical works, and he works from morning till two o'clock each night, and does not even rest on Sundays. I saw his letters and they are admirable, as well for the matter as for the beauty of the illustrations. They already amount to 240 pages. He writes at the rate of twenty pages a day. He only sees Hardiman at meal times. Wakeman is domiciled at Taylor's Hill, too. They think they will be done in five or six days more. O'D. wishes to know where he shall go to. Kilkenny, of course; and I would recommend you to let Wakeman continue with him. His sketches will delight you.

“Yours faithfully,

“GEORGE PETRIE.

“To Captain Larcom.”

A fundamental error in estimating the labours of Petrie, O'Donovan, and O'Curry

is to judge them by their printed works alone. It is necessary to repeat this frequently, for the general reader cannot, from the nature of the case, become acquainted with the enormous mass of unpublished material which these three men left after them. When one considers that Petrie's observations extended from the Stone Age up, we may say, to the present day, that at one time he is sketching and writing about a dolmen of the Stone Age, at another time a cinerary urn of the Bronze Age, at another time a sword of the Iron Age, at another time an early Christian stone oratory or bee-hive cell, at another time an Irish Romanesque church; when one remembers that such sketches and such accounts are scattered in the pages of periodicals, in letters, or on stray pieces of paper, or in manuscript volumes, some estimate may be formed of the hundred and one lines of research which he opened up. In our day of systematic specialisation his method of work may seem somewhat erratic, but it must be remembered that he was a pioneer, and that the circumstances of the time forced him to survey the whole rather than specialise in a part. Furthermore, his observations were made from year to year and as opportunity offered, and in the end it became almost

impossible to co-ordinate them. As an example of this, take his collection of Irish inscriptions, published after his death by Miss Margaret Stokes.\* Of this collection Dr. Wm. Stokes† says: “Dr. Petrie left behind him a valuable collection of ancient Irish inscriptions ranging in date from the seventh to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. They are outline drawings copied on the spot by his sure and accurate pencil on sheets of note-paper, backs of old letters, and such other scraps as he had at hand. He frequently went, for a few days, on trips or excursions into the country, generally in company with some intimate friends, for the express purpose of searching for such monuments and copying their inscriptions. To him, indeed, may be said to belong the praise of having revived the true reading and interpretation of those inscriptions which for centuries had been regarded as illegible by our best antiquaries.” But let us point out that here, again, Petrie must share with O’Donovan and O’Curry “the praise of having revived the true reading and interpretation of

\* *Christian Inscriptions in the Irish Language*; chiefly Collected and Drawn by George Petrie, LL.D., and edited by M. Stokes. Vol. I, 1872; Vol. II, 1878. 4to. Dublin: University Press.

† *Life of Petrie*, p. 410.

those inscriptions.”\* Petrie had intended to write an essay on the inscriptions, as is clear from fragments still remaining, and from a blank book containng drawings of the crosses or other ornamentation as well as of the inscriptions. Apart from their value for general history and topography, these delicate drawings supply the materials for a chapter on the decline of La Tène† ornament and the rise of the interlaced Byzantine-Romanesque design.

Of the inestimable value of these records made in the first half of the nineteenth century, one example will suffice. In *Christian Inscriptions*, Vol. I, p. 39, and Plate XXXI, Fig. 82, will be found an account and sketch of a tombstone at Clonmacnoise bearing the inscription, *Suibne mac Mailae h-Umai* and the figure

\* *Life of Petrie*, p. 414.

† *La Tène*: a proto-historic Celtic camp near Neuchâtel, Switzerland, where finds have been made with a later form of spiral ornament, characterised by double lines with a comma-like loop. The ornament was brought to Ireland probably by Celts of the Iron Age (*La Tène*) about 300 B.C. On the other hand, the well-known marvellously interlaced patterns, generally considered as typically Celtic, came to Ireland in the Early Christian period, and gradually supplanted the *La Tène* ornament. The freedom of the interlaced pattern made it more suitable for filling up large spaces. It is interesting to note that the *La Tène* spiral makes its last stand as an ornament on raised bosses and small circumscribed areas.

of a Celtic cross. In the circular centre of the cross is a beautiful and typical specimen of the La Tène spiral, and the whole design points to the finest period of monumental art at Clonmacnoise. It was a record of the first importance, for the person whom it commemorated was one of the best-known of the famous scholars of Clonmacnoise. His identification is certain from the fact that his father's name, Mael-Umai, is given. References to him are found not only in the Irish Annals, but in the *English Chronicle of Florence of Worcester*, in the *Saxon Chronicle* and in the *Annales Cambrai*.\* Professor Macalister, whose own work on Clonmacnoise entitles him to speak as a first-hand authority on the subject, has emphasized the importance of these monumental slabs as evidences of the excellence of Irish culture. Referring to this monument, he says that it "was to be seen at Clonmacnoise as late as 1822, and was drawn by Dr. Petrie; it has since disappeared, with no less than

\* A.D. 892, "Eodem anno Swifneh doctor Scottorum peritissimus obiit," *Florentii Wigorniensis Chronicon*, Tom. I, p. 109. Ed. Thorpe. A.D. 891, "7 Swifneh se betsta lareow pe on Scottom waes gefor," i.e. "Suibne the best scholar of the Irish died," *Saxon Chronicle*. A.D. 889, "Suibn Scottorum sapientissimus obiit," "Suibne wisest of the Irish died," *Annales Cambrai*, p. 15. Ed. J. Williams ab Ithel.

sixty-four others, of which records are preserved, and what has become of it no one can tell.”\* We may rejoice to-day that the industry and patriotic zeal of Petrie and his fellow-workers have placed the record of them out of the reach of destruction, but the loss of the monuments themselves is a lasting disgrace.

Petrie himself was fully alive to the necessity of popularising his views on Irish archæology. As we have seen, he and O'Donovan wrote article after article in the *Dublin Penny Journal* of 1832-1833, and in 1840 they returned to this work in a new venture—the *Irish Penny Journal*. Petrie illustrates his articles with charming wood-cuts, which add much to the value of this famous magazine.

Meanwhile the work on the Ordnance Survey was drawing to a close. One volume, that on Londonderry, was published in 1839, and was hailed with universal praise. The Survey had banded together Petrie, O'Curry, and O'Donovan in a common cause; it had provided them with a small income which barely left them free to pursue their disinterested and highly intellectual pursuits, and common sense would have persuaded any paternal Government to

\* *Cluain Maccu Nois* (Clonmacnois). By R. A. Macalister, M.A. Dublin: Catholic Truth Soc. of Ireland.



continue them in their work. But, notwithstanding the representations of the most enlightened men of the day in Ireland, the grant to the Topographical and Archæological Department was withdrawn, and the three great scholars were left henceforth to fend for themselves. As we shall see, neither O'Curry nor O'Donovan ceased from their labours; on the contrary, freed from official duties, they betook themselves to the composition and editing of those works by which they are best known, and in this light we may not regret the freedom which came to them at this time. Petrie, also finding himself free, turned to the arrangement and publication of the great mass of material which had during these years (up to 1842) accumulated under his hand.

## CHAPTER XIII

### PETRIE'S WORK ON THE ROUND TOWERS

IN 1833, as we have seen, Petrie won a Gold Medal and a prize of fifty pounds offered by the Royal Irish Academy for an Essay on the Origin and Uses of the Round Towers of Ireland. These striking monuments had awakened much antiquarian curiosity, and men like Vallancey, Betham,

O'Brien, John Windele and the other members of the South Munster Archæological Society had put forward theories which Petrie considered wanting in scientific proof. Since 1833 he had acquired an enormous mass of material bearing on ecclesiastical antiquities, and, freed from the Survey work, he determined to present it to the public in a comprehensive form as an amplification of his original Essay on the Round Towers. "For this amplification of my original Essay," he says, "into a work of great national scope, I am alone answerable; and whatever may be the faults found with its execution, I trust the Academy and the Public generally will give me credit, at least, for the motives which influenced me in thus extending the field of my enquiries, and I believe that I was actuated solely to undertake this additional labour by an ardent desire to rescue the antiquities of my native country from unmerited oblivion, and give them their just place among those of the old Christian nations of Europe."\*

\* Preface, p. v, *The Ecclesiastical Architecture of Ireland Anterior to the Anglo-Norman Invasion*, Comprising an Essay on the Origin and Uses of the Round Towers of Ireland, which obtained the Gold Medal and Prize of the Royal Irish Academy. By George Petrie, R.H.A., V.P.R.I.A. (2nd Ed.) Dublin: Hodges & Smith, Grafton Street. MDCCCXLV.

This work of Petrie's was epoch-making. Its establishment and use of scientific criteria give him the right to be considered the founder of a school which marks a new era in antiquarian work. General Vallancey has been described as the founder of the school to which Petrie, O'Donovan, and O'Curry belonged. Nothing could be further from the truth. No one wishes to rob Vallancey, Betham, and others of their claim to a due meed of praise for having taken an interest in the language and antiquities of Ireland ; but in the department of knowledge in which they and Petrie encountered one another, their standpoint was as different from his as would be that of a medieval astrologer from that of Copernicus or Galileo. Only a mistaken and almost meaninglessly comprehensive application of the word "school" could justify such a use of it.

Petrie sums up the results of his studies on the Round Towers in the following conclusions :—

I. That the Towers are of Christian and ecclesiastical origin and were erected at various periods between the fifth and thirteenth centuries.

II. That they were designed to answer, at least, a twofold use, namely, to serve as belfries, and as keeps, or places of

strength, in which the sacred utensils, books, relics, and other valuables were deposited, and into which the ecclesiastics to whom they belonged could retire for security in case of sudden predatory attack.

III. That they were probably also used, when occasion required, as beacons and watch-towers.

These conclusions, which have been already advocated *separately* by many distinguished antiquaries—among whom are Molyneux, Ledwich, Pinkerton, Sir Walter Scott, Montmorenci, Brewer, and Otway—will be proved by the following evidences:—

For the FIRST CONCLUSION (I), namely, that the Towers are of Christian origin:

1. The Towers are *never* found unconnected with ancient ecclesiastical foundations.

2. Their architectural styles exhibit no features or peculiarities not equally found in the *original* churches with which they are locally connected, when such remain.

3. On several of them Christian emblems are observable, and others display in the details a style of architecture universally acknowledged to be of Christian origin.

4. They possess, invariably, architectural features not found in any buildings in Ireland ascertained to be of Pagan times.

For the **SECOND CONCLUSION (II)**, namely, that they were intended to serve the double purpose of belfries and keeps, or castles, for the uses already specified :

1. Their architectural construction, as will appear, eminently favours this conclusion.

2. A variety of passages, extracted from our annals and other authentic documents, will prove that they were constantly applied to both these purposes.

For the **THIRD CONCLUSION (III)**, namely, that they may have also been occasionally used as beacons and watch-towers :

1. There are some historical evidences which render such an hypothesis extremely probable.

2. The necessity which must have existed in early Christian times for such beacons and watch-towers, and the perfect fitness of the Round Towers to answer such purposes, will strongly support this conclusion.

These conclusions—or, at least such of them as presume the Towers to have had a Christian origin, and to have served the purpose of a belfry—will be further corroborated by the uniform and concurrent tradition of the country, and, above all, by authentic evidences which shall be adduced, relative to the erection of several of the

Towers, with the names and eras of their founders.\*

Up to Petrie's time the suggested origins of the Round Towers divided themselves into three classes: Danish, Eastern, and Christian. The popular habit of ascribing early or pre-historic monuments to the Danes † is well known to every Irish antiquary. Stone Age, Bronze Age, Iron Age, and Christian monuments, the use of which were not well determined, were frequently set down as of Danish origin.‡

The theory of the Eastern origin of the Round Towers originated, as Petrie states, "in the fanciful brain of General Vallancey." Vallancey supported his views by parallels between "the fire-towers of the Persians and the Irish Round Towers," and by fanciful etymological resemblances between Irish and Oriental languages. Sir William Betham's theory Petrie dis-

\* Petrie, *Eccles. Architecture*, pp. 78 et seq.

† The Danish origin of the Round Towers was advocated by Peter Walsh in his *Prospect of Ireland*, 1684, pp. 416, 417; Dr. Molyneux in *Natural History of Ireland by Boate and Molyneux*, pp. 210, 211; and Ledwich, *Antiquities* (2nd Ed.), pp. 158, 159, etc.

‡ The approximate dates of these Ages in the Irish area will show how ridiculous these ascriptions were. The *Stone Age* ends about 1300 B.C.; the *Bronze Age* extends from about 1300 B.C. to about 500 B.C.; the *Iron Age* from about 500 B.C. into the Christian Era.

misses as unsupported by evidence worthy of refutation. With those who maintained the Christian origin of the Round Towers Petrie was in general agreement. He differed from them on the question of their exclusive use or uses.

As in his work on Tara, Petrie in his Essay on the Round Towers, adopted a simple yet scientific method. Two main classes of evidence were examined, namely, (1) the monuments themselves; (2) the references to them in the manuscript literature. But before discussing his application of his method it is not unnecessary in a popular exposition to make one or two things clear. In the first place, the scope of Petrie's enquiry did not extend to the *ultimate* origin of the architectural form of building known as the Round Tower. The history of the evolution of the Irish Round Tower belongs to Comparative Archæology; and Petrie, wisely enough, felt that he had quite enough to do with the study of the restricted Irish area. His excursions into Comparative Archæology are rather of a negative and destructive character, undertaken with the purpose of stopping the hasty generalisations of Vallancey and others. But when he sees his way clearly and scientifically, as in the proto-historic origin of

the beehive cells, or the Christian origin of the quadrangular form and upright walls of early Christian churches in Ireland, he shows us that, had he lived in our day, he would be a pioneer in the most up-to-date comparative work. In the second place, guess-work may, by mere accident, hit upon a solution which is true, but in ninety-nine per cent. of its results it will be wrong.

The Comparative Archæology and the Comparative Philology of Vallancey, Betham, and the rest are based on the fallacious principle of taking general or partial and superficial resemblances as a proof of unity of origin; and it is the adoption of this principle which vitiates their work, and leads to the monstrous etymologies which stud their pages. The filiation between East and West, which is being brought about by modern scientific Archæology, may appear to have a kind of resemblance to the guess-work of the school of Vallancey, but it is in reality a distinct and independent result attained by a method which is the very negation of his method. Even in our day it is not out of place to issue a note of warning. Popular manuals on Archæology, Ethnology, Anthropology, and, indeed, on many other sciences, are placing before the public



mind tentative theories as almost certain facts. The wonderful excavations in Crete and in the Ægean generally have opened up a new world of fact; but it is well to point out that many of the theories based upon these facts are more or less tentative. For example, there is a decided tendency to refer to the Ægean area as a centre of origin, when it may well be merely a focus of result. Fortunately scientific voices are being raised here and there in warning against this over-attractive theory. What we want is more spade work. It must be remembered that we are only at the beginning of an age marked by the development of the science of origins; and the scholar is wanting in a sense of responsibility who does not make it clear to the general public at what point his facts end and his theories begin. Many an attractive and facile theory must have presented itself to the mind of Petrie, but he put them behind him and pressed on to the accumulation of facts.

As we have said, two lines of investigation were followed by Petrie. In the first he deals with the monuments themselves. The Irish Round Tower, singular as it is in its rotund form, is one of the stone monuments of Ireland. What, then, was its relation to other monuments of stone in Ireland?

The answer to this question led Petrie to open up the subject of Ecclesiastical Architecture, and as a corollary to touch upon the stone monuments of Celtic antiquity. For the sake of the general reader we may briefly give an outline of the sequence of stone monuments (i.e., standing structures) in Ireland. The earliest standing structure belongs to the Polished Stone Age (which extends in Ireland up to about 1800 B.C.). A typical example is the *dolmen*—popularly known as a *cromlech*—consisting of four or more standing stones capped by a covering stone. To the transition period between the Stone Age and the Bronze in Ireland is to be ascribed the great hill-tumuli, such as New Grange, Knowth, and Dowth, on the Boyne. These elaborate chamber tombs of cruciform shape are formed in the entrance passage of rows of standing stones capped by covering slabs, and the terminating dome-chamber is built up of a series of stones, placed horizontally, one projecting slightly beyond the other till they meet at the summit and are capped by one flat slab. In no case is there any evidence of the use of mortar.

The Bronze Age extends in Ireland from about 1800 B.C. to about 500 B.C. The frequent practice of cremation in the Bronze

Age, in the Irish area at least, is marked by small tombs, consisting generally of four side slabs capped by a fifth, and enclosing a cinerary urn.

Finally, a striking series of monuments, to be found especially along the coast from Kerry to the Aran Islands, forms an important feature amidst the stone structures of Ireland. These are the "cashels" or stone "Dúns," such as Staigue Fort, or the Dún Mór in Dingle peninsula, or Dún Aengus in Aran. They are huge circular structures, built of uncemented stones, and unlike the previous stone structures, residences for the living and not for the dead. That they belong to the Pagan period there is no doubt, but their particular age is still uncertain, though it is possible that they are to be ascribed to the Bronze Age. As we have seen, in dealing with Tara Petrie was dealing with a monument of the Iron Age, or at least with its history in the Iron Age and Christian era more particularly.

This brings us to the introduction of Christianity, and with it the introduction into Ireland of a new class of building. The following pregnant passage suggests the comprehensiveness of Petrie's outlook. Having given the text and translation, by O'Donovan, of the famous tract *Senéar*

na pelec or "History of the Cemeteries," from the *Leabhar na h-Uidhre*, he continues : "The preceding document will, I think, be sufficient to satisfy all rational inquirers of the visionary character of the hypothesis of the Round Towers having been erected as places of sepulture, at least in pagan times ; for, though it does not throw any light on the character of the monuments in use preceding Christianity, it refers us distinctly to their principal localities, in many of which we may still examine the monuments themselves. Our ancient manuscripts, in like manner, acquaint us with the localities of the principal battle-fields in Ireland, and with the particular monuments of the most distinguished kings and warriors, from the earliest periods to the establishment of Christianity in the country ; and in most of these localities the monuments still remain. But do we in any of those places discover a Round Tower, or the vestige of one ? Most assuredly not, nor any monument having a characteristic in common with one. We find the stone carn and the green mound with their sepulchral chambers within them, and their monumental character indicated by the upright stones, sometimes single—like the *stele* of the Greeks—and sometimes forming a circle,

or concentric circles. We find the giants' graves or beds, as they are called by the Irish, the cromlechs, and Druids' altars of speculative antiquaries. And when we explore any of these monuments we find, according to their age, either the rude *unglazed* sepulchral urn of baked clay, and occasionally of stone, containing bones more or less calcined, or unburned skeletons, or occasionally both, in the same sepulchre. We also find very frequently weapons of stone or metal; and, in monuments of importance, indicating the distinguished rank of the persons interred, ornaments of silver and gold. And that such and no other were the varieties of sepulchral monuments in use in Ireland in pagan times, a volume of historical evidences from our ancient manuscripts might be adduced to prove."\*

Petrie then quotes from the *Dinnsenchus* and the *Annals of Ulster*, to show the traditional ascription of the cemetery of Brugh na Boinne, and the monuments at New Grange, Knowth, and Dowth on the Boyne, to the Tuatha de Danaan race;†

\* Petrie, *Ecclesiastical Architecture*, pp. 101, 102. (2nd Ed., 1845).

† In *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* and in the *Journal of the Society of Antiquaries*, Miss Dobbs has studied the relation between the spiral ornament, so characteristic at New Grange, and the Tuatha de

and then quotes a poem from *Leabhar na h-Uidhre*, describing the traditionally later Milesian cemetery of Rathcroghan. Only the professional antiquary will fully recognise how brilliant, in the light of modern archæological investigation, is the *résumé* contained in the above passage, written in 1845. Ireland may well be proud of Petrie as a pioneer archæologist.

## CHAPTER XIV

### FURTHER ARCHÆOLOGICAL RESEARCHES

HAVING thus shown that not a particle of evidence, manuscript or otherwise, could be adduced to show a connexion between the Round Towers and the known pagan stone monuments of Ireland, Petrie proceeded\* to the establishment of his thesis that the Round Towers are members of the early ecclesiastical and Christian stone edifices in Ireland. Here, again, his dual method came into play. He appealed to

Danaan. Her work goes to show that the localities associated in Irish tales with the Tuatha de Danaan race are those in which the Bronze Age spiral is found. The method she is following is an extension of that of Petrie.

\* Petrie, *Ecclesiastical Architecture*, p. 122 to the end. (2nd Ed. 1845.)

(1) the monuments themselves, and (2) the manuscript literature. He was met at the outset with a widespread belief, propagated by Sir James Ware, "the first and most judicious," to quote Petrie's words, "of all the writers who have treated of Irish antiquities, and whose work still ranks as our text-book for information on such subjects,"\* namely, that the Irish did not begin to build with stone and mortar until the twelfth century.† Now, the Round Towers are built with stone and mortar; it would therefore follow, if Ware's theory were true, that either they formed isolated and exceptional examples of building with mortar and cement, or that they were erected in or after the twelfth century. Petrie had already shown that in no known pagan stone structure in Ireland was there evidence of the use of lime cement. It remained for him now to show that there was evidence of its use from the first introduction of Christianity, and therefore previous to the twelfth century. This led him to an examination of ecclesiastical buildings from

\* Since Petrie's time modern research has much reduced the value of Ware's and Ussher's works as in any sense authorities.

† This opinion was held also by Sir Wm. Petty, Dr. Molyneux, Dr. Ledwich and others.

the fifth century to the twelfth century, and thus gave rise to his work on the Ecclesiastical Architecture of Ireland. It would be impossible to give here anything like an adequate account of the mass of detailed material which he has gathered into his book. We must be content with indicating his main line of work. His first care was, with the aid of O'Donovan and O'Curry, to establish the authenticity of the references in Irish manuscript literature to the erection or destruction of Irish ecclesiastical buildings.

The terminology was first elucidated—terms like *Domnach*, *damliac*, *tempull*, *eclais*, *regles*, *baslic*, *derteach*, etc., were assigned a definite meaning, and their particular value established. Then the transition from the uncemented stone structures of the pagan period to the cemented buildings of the Christian period was established. “I have also shown,” he says, “in that Essay,\* that the earlier colonists in the country, the Firbolg and Tuatha de Danaan tribes, which our historians bring hither from Greece at a very remote period, were accustomed to build not only their fortresses, but even their dome-roofed houses and sepulchres, of stone without cement, and in the style

\* *Ancient Military Architecture.*



now usually called Cyclopean and Pelasgic. I have also shown that this custom, as applied to their forts and houses, was continued in those parts of Ireland in which those ancient settlers remained, even after the introduction of Christianity, and, as I shall presently show, was adopted by the Christians in their religious structures. As characteristic examples of these ancient religious structures, still remaining in sufficient preservation to show us perfectly what they had been in their original state, I may point to the monastic establishment of St. Molaise, on Inishmurry, in the bay of Sligo, erected in the sixth century; to that of St. Brendan, on Inishglory, off the coast of Erris, in the county of Mayo, erected in the beginning of the same century; and to that of St. Fechin, on Ard-Oilean, or High Island, off the coast of Connemara, in the county of Galway, erected in the seventh century. In all these establishments the churches alone, which are of the simplest construction, are built of lime cement. The houses or cells, erected for the use of the abbots and monks, are of a circular or oval form, having dome roofs, constructed, like those of the ancient Greek and Irish sepulchres, without a knowledge of the principle of the arch, and without the use of cement; and

the whole are encompassed by a broad wall composed of stones of great size, without cement of any kind."

Petrie then traces the evolution of the perfect Irish Romanesque church, such as Cormac's Chapel, Rock of Cashel, from these early churches built with stone and lime cement, such as St. Cianan's Church of Daimhliag, now Duleek in Meath, which he considers one of the first buildings of stone and lime cement erected in Ireland. He also devotes separate notices to Oratories, Belfries (Round Towers), Houses, Erdamhs, Kitchens, and Cashels. In dealing with the evolution of the early Irish churches, Petrie set himself to establish certain criteria. His criteria in the main were based on the size of the building, the cyclopean or non-cyclopean character of the stone-work, and the use of lime cement, the character of the roof, door, and windows, the introduction of the principle of the arch, the introduction of the chancel arch, and finally the use of ornamentation. For example, with delicate discrimination he marks the transition from the doorways with inclined sides and horizontal lintel, as in Gallerus Oratory in Kerry, to those with inclined sides and arched lintel, as in the church of Clooncagh, County Limerick; or, again, he discriminates between the

horizontal-headed, triangular-headed, and arched-headed windows. The beginnings of moulding on doors and windows and the variety of splaying in the latter are noted. Finally, the identity between the famous Celtic ornamentation as found in manuscript and metal work and that on Irish stone work is noticed. The treatment of ornamental detail in the exquisite drawings with which his work is illustrated shows Petrie's singular accuracy and conscientiousness at their best. It has been reserved for later workers to develop this line of investigation. He insists on the Irish character (not necessarily, of course, the purely Irish origin) of the chevron, step-pattern, *triquetra* and interlaced ornaments, and points out their identity with the ornamentation in early Irish manuscripts, such as the *Book of Kells*. He disposes of Ledwich's attempt to prove that ornaments such as the *triquetra* are runic symbols. His acuteness of observation is well exemplified in the following remarks on the ornamentation on the tombstones of Flanncadh, Abbot of Clonmacnoise (*ob. circa* 1002), and of Suibne Mac Mailae h-Umai,\* of Clonmacnoise (*ob. circa* 890): "Another and more common ornament on our inscribed tombstones anterior to the

\* Vide *supra*.

twelfth century, and which is equally common in our most ancient ecclesiastical manuscripts of the earliest date, is that boss-shaped figure formed of radiating eccentric lines, merging into one another as they approach the margin, and leaving between them pear-shaped spaces, generally three in number, but sometimes two or four, or even a greater number. This ornament is usually found within a circle, which forms the centre of a cross carved on such monumental stones, and, like the triquetra, may possibly be symbolic of the Trinity.”\* This is, as we now know, the characteristic pagan La Tène spiral or trumpet pattern, which survived in Irish ornament down to about the beginning of the twelfth century. By his analysis of Irish ornament Petrie prepared the way for the solution of the problems as to its origin. We can only here refer our readers to modern works on Comparative Archæology for an account of the present state of knowledge in this regard. Let us merely say that here again Petrie showed himself a brilliant pioneer. Having described the evolution of the Irish Romanesque church from the early Irish stone churches of the fifth and sixth centuries, he treats

\* *Ecclesiastical Architecture*, pages 326, 327. Vide *supra*.

along similar lines of the Oratories, Erdamhs, Kitchens, and Cashels. He also devotes a special section to the Round Towers. Briefly, he shows that, apart from their rounded and tapering figure, they possess the same characteristics as the line of churches stretching from the fifth or sixth centuries to the twelfth century. They are the same in their stone-work, in their use of lime cement, in their characteristic doors and windows, in their ornamentation, and, finally, he notes, their almost universal association with churches of a similar architectural character. This overwhelming evidence is backed up by continuous extracts from the manuscript literature dealing with their erection or burning, or with the erection or burning of the churches with which they were associated.

In 1834 Petrie received a Gold Medal from the Royal Irish Academy for his work on the Military and Sepulchral Architecture of Ireland. It remains unrevised and unpublished in manuscript on the shelves of the Academy. Exigency of space compels us to deal briefly with it in this essay. It contains a survey of the proto-historic pagan remains of Ireland; and in it Petrie adopts practically the same line of scientific criticism as in his Essay on Ecclesiastical

Architecture. Let us again point out that in Ireland a Stone Age is followed by a Bronze Age, and the Bronze Age by the Iron Age, passing into the Christian Era.

Ireland is studded with monuments of all three ages. Monuments or remains of all three periods and, indeed, of the Christian period may be found in close proximity to one another. The science of Comparative Archæology in our own day has succeeded in establishing criteria by which to separate this accumulation of monuments and remains into regular strata. But even now there are numbers of problems that await solution. Take, for instance, those great stone forts or *Dúns* such as *Dún Aengus* in Aran ; these are still shrouded in mystery, though it may yet be shown that they are monuments of the Bronze Age.\*

It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that Petrie did not see clearly through the entanglement of problems that confronted him in connexion with the pagan antiquities of Ireland. The marvel is that he entered so frequently on the right path to a correct solution. His destructive work was perfect. He swept away theories, ridiculous from a scientific point of view,

\* See article (to be continued) by Prof. R. A. S. Macalister, in *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, April, 1913.

as to the Danish origin of these remains. His line of research tended more and more to establish the validity of native manuscript tradition as to their antiquity; and the most modern research work is on the way to prove that these traditions can no longer be brushed aside as a mass of absolutely unfounded legend. In the light of modern archæology terms such as Firbolg, Tuatha de Danaan, and Milesian are receiving a new interpretation, and the dawn of Petrie's research is opening into the light of day. All honour, then, to Petrie as a pioneer! In the Stone Age he recognised the sepulchral character of the dolmens (or, as they are popularly called, cromlechs), and disposed of the theory that they were Druids' altars. In the great Bronze Age *tumuli*, or tombs, of New Grange, Knowth, and Dowth, on the Boyne, he noted their characteristic structure and ornament and their similarity to the so-called Treasury of Atreus at Mycenæ, which he calls correctly "a *tumulus* of immense size"; whilst he also noted the similarity between Irish bronze ornament and bronze weapons and those of "Greece." He, naturally, drew the conclusion that here he had evidence of the truth of the native tradition that these monuments and weapons were the work of Greek in-

vaders. In his time the fallacy of identifying a form of ornament or a particular type of antiquarian remains with race was quite natural. The truth is that the Bronze Age ornament, for example, came to Ireland through commerce and not through invasion. This does not prevent the native tradition as to the "Greek" origin of the Bronze Age peoples bearing a true interpretation. What that interpretation may be we need not enter into here. Suffice it to say that the growth of allied sciences, such as Ethnology, Anthropology and Comparative Philology, has in our day helped us to travel with surer step through the entangled labyrinths due to the crossings of race, of language, and of antiquarian forms. It is only quite recently that the fundamental fallacy of identifying race with language has been removed from our Historical Grammars. In associating, as to age, the great *cathairs* of the West, such as Dún Aengus, with the Bronze Age tumuli, Petrie seems again to have been in the right track, though, as we have said, the Bronze Age origin of these *cathairs* is not yet established. In similar fashion he dealt with the remains at Carrowmore and Clover Hill, Sligo, and on the battle-field of Moytura, where tradition says the



Firbolg were defeated by the Tuatha de Danaan.\* The great stone circles he considered to be of sepulchral origin. Professor Macalister believes them to have been temples, but does not deny their association with a place of sepulture,† and thinks them in all probability of the Bronze Age. Considering its unfinished and unrevised state and the earliness of its composition, Petrie's Essay on Military and Sepulchral Architecture gives us an earnest of what his maturer work would have been. As Dr. Stokes says : "It is plain that at this time [i.e., 1834] Petrie had not gone into the entire subject of Ancient Irish sepulture. He had done much in showing the true nature of the 'cromlech,' or so-called Druidic altars, and has brought the light of history to bear, not on them alone, but on the four principal monuments of the Boyne, even to their very identification ; and from what he has done in this Essay, written in 1834, some estimate may be made of what he would afterwards have accomplished had opportunity been afforded to him."‡

\* Vide articles by Miss Dobbs referred to *supra*.

† *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, April, 1913: "Footprints of History in Ireland," p. 381.

‡ Stokes' *Life of Petrie*, p. 237.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE ANCIENT MUSIC OF IRELAND

As we have seen, Petrie, in his early years, was an artist. In later years he devoted himself to antiquarian work, and to antiquarian illustrations in which his artistic powers found a vent. Later, with the exception of a few paintings, he kept rigidly along the path of antiquarian investigation. His artistic sense found scope for its exercise, however, in his descriptions of those relics of Christian culture which made Ireland famous for stone and metal work and manuscript illumination from the sixth to the twelfth centuries. He lays stress upon the rise of the Fine Arts in Ireland under the fostering care of the Christian Church, and we possess his charming and accurate descriptions of the great classes of artistic work which add to the glory of the Church in Ireland. That Church is famous for its splendid faith and its wonderful missionary spirit. It is also famous for its fine artistic work from the sixth to the twelfth centuries. Amidst the persecutions of later years it displayed its heroic qualities of endurance and its living

faith, but the decline of its artistic powers is to be ascribed to the unfavourable circumstances under which it was forced to live.

Petrie was the first to bring under the notice of artistic Europe the beauty of our illuminated manuscripts, of our croziers and crosses and shrines, of our stone crosses and sepulchral monuments. He tried to awaken popular interest in the subject in a series of papers contributed to the *Dublin Penny Journal*. In addition he wrote accurate descriptions of the chief antiquities of the Christian period acquired by the Museum of the Royal Irish Academy, amongst the most notable being the Domnach Airgid, the Gospels of St. Molaise, the ancient consecrated Bells of Ireland, such as the Bell of St. Patrick, the Cross of Cong, the Shrine of St. Manchan, the Fiacal Pádraig, the Miosach of St. Columba, and the Tara Brooch. With all the keen perception of the artist he emphasized those evidences of refined and spiritual delicacy of drawing, of sense for balance and freedom, which make Irish line ornamentation—as in the *Book of Kells*, or on the Ardagh Chalice—the finest the world has ever seen.

The charm of social intercourse between Petrie, O'Donovan, and O'Curry was en-

hanced by their common love of Irish Music. O'Curry devoted a notable section of his *Lectures on the Manners and Customs of the Ancient Irish* to "Music and Musical Instruments in Ancient Erin." When but seventeen years of age, Petrie gave Tom Moore some Irish airs. In a journal of a tour in Wicklow in 1808, we find the following entry: "Got one Peter Power to spend the evening with me, having heard that he had many Irish airs; got but two from him." Petrie viewed Irish music from two points of view: as an antiquary he saw in the folk-music of Ireland another evidence of the early and traditional culture of the Irish race; and as a man of artistic feeling he saw in it a perennial source of pleasure. His first essay on Irish Music appeared in the *Dublin Examiner* of the year 1816.

To Bunting's *Ancient Music of Ireland*, he contributed a notice on the ancient harp in Trinity College, known as Brian Boroimhe's Harp. "In December, 1851, a society for the preservation and publication of the melodies of Ireland was founded with Petrie as President. One volume, consisting entirely of airs collected by Petrie, appeared under the superintendence of this society in 1855. On the subject of his collection he corresponded with Thomas

Moore, MacDowell, Chappell, Eugene O'Curry, J. P. Joyce and others."\*

Unlike Moore and Stephenson, he made no attempt at modernising his collection: he gives us plough tunes, spinning tunes, smiths' tunes, millers' and carters' songs, lullabys, dance airs, and others, just as they have come down the centuries. He was not in a position to discuss the apparently thorny subject of the origin of the Irish scale; but he knew that in Irish Music he was dealing with something which was both primitive and beautiful.

In 1857, on the occasion of a meeting of the British Association at Dublin, the Ethnological Section organised a visit to the Aran Islands. Amongst the Irish visitors were Petrie, O'Curry, O'Donovan, F. W. Burton, Samuel Ferguson, Whitley Stokes, Dr. Wm. Stokes, Sir Wm. Wilde, Haverty and others. And it was this occasion which gave rise to the following pen-picture by Dr. William Stokes of the enthusiasm of Petrie and O'Curry for Irish Music: "To this cottage [in the little village of Kilronan], when evening fell, Petrie with his manuscript book and violin, and always accompanied by his friend O'Curry, used to proceed. Nothing could exceed the

\* Stokes' *Life of Petrie*, p. 340.

strange picturesqueness of the scenes which night after night were thus presented. On approaching the house, always lighted up by a blazing turf fire, it was seen surrounded by the islanders, whilst its interior was crowded with figures, the rich colours of whose dresses, heightened by the fire-light, showed with a strange vividness and variety, while their fine countenances were all animated with curiosity and pleasure. It would have required a Rembrandt to paint the scene. The minstrel—sometimes an old woman, sometimes a beautiful girl or a young man—was seated on a low stool in the chimney-corner, while chairs for Petrie and O'Curry were placed opposite; the rest of the crowded audience remained standing. The song having been given, O'Curry wrote the Irish words, when Petrie's work began. The singer recommenced, stopping at a signal from him at every two or three bars of the melody to permit the writing of the notes, and often repeating the passage until it was correctly taken down, and then going on with the melody, exactly from the point where the singing was interrupted. The entire air being at last obtained, the singer—a second time—was called to give the song continuously, and when all corrections had been made, the violin—an instrument of

great sweetness and power—was produced, and the air played, as Petrie alone could play it, and often repeated.

“Never was the inherent love of music among the Irish people more shown than on this occasion; they listened with deep attention, while their heartfelt pleasure was expressed less by exclamations than by gestures; and when the music ceased, a general and murmured conversation, in their own language, took place, which would continue until the next song was commenced.”\*

It is a pity that the clever pencil of Burton did not sketch for us the group of distinguished scholars who met in Aran in 1857. It would stand as a symbol of the undying spirit of Irish intellectual life, and to that there could be no more fitting background than this rock-bound island home of the past ages of Celtic civilisation.

Petrie loved every inch of Irish ground. With the exception of a few visits to England and to Scotland, his whole life was spent in Ireland and for Ireland. His vitality to the end was astonishing. He was an old man of seventy years on the occasion of his next and last visit to the West in 1859, and Stokes,

\* Stokes' *Life of Petrie*, pp. 317, 318.

who was with him at the time, has left on record this evidence of his joyous spirit: "In the district of Burren [County Clare]—the Arabia Petraea of Ireland—so rich in the remains of Pagan and early Christian times, and with its invigorating air and singular rock scenery, his spirits became almost boyish. On leaving Ballyvaughan the party had to meet the train at Oranmore; the day was showery, and he had remained within doors; but even when the last moment for departure had arrived, he was found dancing round the room to his own spirit-stirring music, while Irish planxties, Spanish fandangos and boleros fell in showers from his violin, and not till the very last moment could he be got to mount the car."

Great workers must, at some time or other, pay the penalty of originality. The crowd cannot follow them up the heights, and hence they will suffer from the loneliness of isolation and neglect. In O'Curry and O'Donovan he had fellow-workers in kindred subjects; they too were climbing the heights, but along somewhat different paths. In Lord Adare and Dr. William Stokes he had the kindest of friends and sympathisers, and in his daughters he found a wealth of filial affection and love.



But the strain of years of work began to tell upon the old man, as it did on O'Curry and O'Donovan, and with it came the temptation to regret: "Can you wonder," he says, "if I should regret that I ever abandoned the practice of that delightful art [Painting], which would have secured me distinction, competence, and peace, and probably length of years, to do things that I thought of more value to the world? And yet I do not regret it. But I suffer; and it may deprive my poor girls of a life which is, at least, of great value to them."\*

It was a cry of weakness; but he soon regained his old self. He loved the Irish people and the freedom of Irish Art, and one of his last public acts was to resign the Presidency of the Royal Hibernian Academy as a protest against the withdrawal of the evening exhibitions for working-men, and against the new Charter which gave the Government a veto in all elections of members and nominees on committee. To the end the Celtic lands exercised a wondrous fascination over him, and in the autumn of the year 1864, Petrie, now seventy-five years of age, paid his first and last visit to the home of St. Columba, Glencolumbkille, in the County of

\* Stokes' *Life of Petrie*, p. 374.

Donegal. On his return to Dublin he devoted himself to the preparation of a catalogue of his beloved antiquities, and in the midst of his work Death called him on the 17th January, 1866. He was buried in Mount Jerome Cemetery, Dublin.

He has found, let us hope, something greater than the distinction, competence, and peace, which, in a moment of regret, he had sighed for ; he has found a place in the loving memory of the Irish People.

THE END



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